

DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

&

ISLAM

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TO BEND THE WILLOW BRANCH,  
ONE MUST KNOW THE ROOTS

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## INTRODUCTION

The moment is propitious to take a hard look at the efficacy of strategies designed to promote liberal political values in Islamic societies. The metaphoric democratic wave that gained impetus from the Soviet Union's breakup has registered successes in most of the world. The Islamic world, the Arab Middle East in particular, stands out among the regions resistant to democratization. Its strategic importance highlights the analytical and policy issues we place under the heading: Islam & Democracy. For Middle Eastern politics is at the heart of concerns about energy security, international terrorist movements, nuclear proliferation, a conjectured region-wide Sunni/Shiite 'civil war,' and the toxic effects of inflammatory crises in Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon. The absence of accountable, representative governments is commonly cited as cause and reinforced effect of these turbulent conditions. In truth, the seeming correlation of authoritarian leadership and endemic conflict does not necessarily imply a causal connection. The objective reality is that such a connection is assumed in the West – by intellectuals, politicians, policy-makers and publics. The saliency of the Middle East in their interest calculations and threat perceptions has reinforced the conviction that outside parties have reason and opportunity to inflect the course of political development there. Exigencies have and do intrude to force tactical qualification of this commitment to democracy. Yet, it continues to bulk large in thinking about the region's long-term stability.

Ever since the sea changes in the world's strategic map that occurred in 1989 – 1991, the United States and Western Europe have been in the democracy promotion

business. They have been motivated by political philosophy, sense of obligation and self-interest. Their efforts, for the most part, have been in parallel, occasionally in tandem, and in exceptional cases have followed different interpretations of the same score. Western European policies themselves have not always been consistent due to inadequate synchronization between the European Union and member governments. This paper takes that state of affairs as a given even as it contrasts noteworthy divergences between the American and a generalized European perspective.

Our purposes are five-fold. The first is to examine what the thinking and policies on the two sides of the Atlantic have in common and where they are in disaccord. That is the done in Part I. Its aim is to discern underlying Western ideas about each entity's self-conception and how it relates to the world. Those images are seen as key to their interpretations of political conditions in the Islamic Middle East and of what external parties can and cannot do to influence them. The following section, Part II, delineates democracy's component elements as a step toward clarifying their possible place in regional polities. Part III examines the West's projects of 'hands on' democracy promotion in Afghanistan and Iraq with a view to drawing implications for the larger strategy. Part IV addresses the issue as to whether the Middle East's manifest shortfalls in regard to open political systems is rooted in distinctive socio-cultural conditions, as widely claimed, or should be understand in historical terms. Here, I argue that there are distinguishing features of the region's past and present that provide persuasive explanation for the prevailing political culture in the region. They include a multifaceted experience of imposed external rule

that has had a distorting effect on institutions and beliefs. Part V looks at the vexed question of whether Islam – as religion, as culture, as society – carries within it certain elements that are antithetical to democracy. I deconstruct democracy into its constituent ingredients so as to develop a finer grained picture of the interplay among culture, political culture and political forms. A brief Conclusion draws on this wide-ranging, point-counterpoint, analysis to offer proposals on what outside parties may contribute to a regional process of political reform.

### **I. Europe, America & The Middle East**

The United States and the Europeans have sought through a variety of programs to inculcate the social norms and political methods associated with a sustained commitment to human rights and democratic governance. Means have varied from the American spoon feeding of occupied Iraq through targeted campaigns of support for reformist groups and public suasion to low-key tutorials. The problematic outcome of these efforts to date focuses attention on the limitations external parties face in using either direct or indirect means to influence how other societies shape their public institutions. To understand better the nature of these manifest limitations it is necessary to take a searching look at how they are perceived, and responded to by the initiating governments and by countries at the receiving end.

The first part of paper is framed by these questions:

- ❑ How do policy-makers in the West understand their possible contribution to liberal political change in the Islamic world?
- ❑ How do they assess the cultural factor (broadly defined) in determining whether a graft will take and how its growth will be affected by the nature of the root stock?

- ❑ What difference is made by how the proposed reforms are expressed to leaders and political elites in target countries?

### The United States

Democracy promotion as a philosophy and as a diplomatic strategy is animated by American idealism. Idealism in the United States is exceptional in a number of respects. It expresses the belief in progress guided by reason that lies at the heart of the United States' civic religion. America was born in a condition of 'original virtue.' America is seen as having a mission to serve as agent of a teleology in the world's affairs that points to the global triumph of enlightened liberal principles. That mission is unique to the United States; the truth it embodies is taken to be universal. Hence, American tends to be inattentive to cultural differences even as it is 'culture-blind' in the positive sense of the term. History, too, is seen as yielding to the will of the well-intended. Therein lies the optimistic conviction that the United States can successfully sponsor what looks audaciously improbable to others. Therein lies as well the basis for the unquestioned assumption of its good intentions – and their power to succeed.

Those convictions were reinvigorated by victory in the Cold War and further reinforced by democracy's implantation in the newly liberated countries of East and Central Europe. A program to foster a liberal form of politics in the Islamic world was a natural extension. Dedication to doing so received impetus from the so-called 'war on terror' launched with a vengeance after the horrific events of 9/11.

9/11 stunned Americans. Once the initial shock wore off, they reacted in character. An enemy was defined in concrete terms, a pro-active strategy to solve the problem it posed was set in motion, and an open-ended commitment was made to



root the enemy – concretely, al-Qaeda, retrograde Muslim regimes more generally. Equally evident, an extremely low risk tolerance became a feature of American security thinking. The vulnerability exposed by the attacks has had a lasting effect on the national psyche because of its suddenness, lack of precedent and vivid imagery. Unpredictable future actions by an unseen and little understood enemy fostered a free-floating security anxiety. At the highest policy-making circles, this feeling skewed standard benefit/cost/probability analyses. Calculations were not ones of marginal gains or losses, their likelihood, and the balance of the two. Rather, they concentrated on the exceptionally heavily weighted goal of eliminating totally the greatest threat visualized, as far into the future as one could see.

Afghanistan was the immediate target. Unseating the Taliban and installing an accountable government under Western patronage bolstered confidence in Washington and heightened ambitions. The Bush administration then set itself the objective of toppling Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The President's men were persuaded that the elimination of a leader supposedly bent on building unconventional weapons was crucial to attenuating the latent dangers represented by virulently anti-Western Islam. However, his mere replacement by another autocratic leader, Ba'athist or military, did not satisfy American interest in a risk-free Iraq; nor did it serve the larger ends of the emerging strategy for a political transformation of the Middle East as a whole.

It followed inexorably that regime change was essential. In the abstract, various types of regimes were imaginable. In the thinking of American leaders, only

the building of a constitutional democracy made sense. This was true for three reasons. First, a democracy where the exercise of power is based on the consent of the governed is the sole political arrangement that provides assurance against reckless state actions. This judgment is predicated on the doctrinal belief that the citizenry at large has no appetite for war; and it harbors no grandiose dreams of national or religious glory through demonstrated prowess on the battlefield. Indeed, the citizenry at large sees war as squandering scarce economic resources and putting in jeopardy their safety. This essentialist Kantian postulate thrives in official Washington, by no means only within neo-conservative circles. The downfall of a rogue state meant an end to an incubator, refuge or collaborator of terrorists of all stripes.

Too, to supersede autocracy by democracy was viewed as the most promising way of addressing, and drying up, the sources of inspiration and recruitment for violent, jhadist groups. According to the prevailing diagnosis, fundamentalism flourishes where hope for a free and prosperous life has been abandoned, where repression is a daily hardship, where blatant corruption mocks moral principles. The vainglorious, economically stagnant, ethically compromised regimes that hold power in most of the broader Middle East were seen as the underlying problem. Its manifestation supposedly is the jihadist mindset: irrationally anti-Western; in search of redemption in a world beyond; and devoutly intolerant. Another is a widespread sympathetic tolerance for those who act in conformity with that mindset. The antidote is reform – political (building democracy), economic (unleashing the curative power of free markets and engaging the globalized world), and cultural (encouraging

more open societies). Prescription followed diagnosis. The West, with the United States in the lead, has a critical catalytic role to play in that reform process. It can encourage elites, cajole current officeholders, and propagate a vision of a better future to the Muslim street. Such initiative, it has been argued, will not be taken as alien or intrusive since it coincides with the interests, proclivities and aspirations of the large majority. The companion premise is that outside sponsorship is not a liability since the selflessness of the virtuous act will be recognized, as was taken to be the case in Iraq. Crucial to the success of this sort of enterprise is the living model of a liberalized Arab country, one that functions as a working democracy, that allocates economic resources to the welfare of its populace and that nurtures a vibrant yet positive mode of Islam.

Iraq was nominated for this role. That motivation reinforced the stated concern about WMD and postulated ties between Baghdad and al-Qaeda. By dint of circumstances, Iraq thereby became the centerpiece of a far-reaching plan to reconfigure the political landscape of the Middle East. Its core premises were:

- ❑ The democratization project should maximize its effectiveness by enlisting as many democratic countries as possible in a multifaceted campaign of suasion. This is a moral undertaking whose actions are justifiable, indeed validated in ethical terms.
- ❑ The United States is uniquely endowed to lead such an enterprise. In addition to its material strength, it has the capacity to inspire – it remains the beacon of idealism for those yearning to be free of repression.
- ❑ American efforts to impress its vision on other governments are not tainted by imperial ambition. America's rectitude and civic virtue validate its role as guide and prophet.

There was yet another, cardinal pay-off to be expected by this progression. The expected ramifying effects of the democratic transformation would be to cut the ground from under jihadist movements; constrain, isolate, pressure and eventually eliminate rogue regimes (i.e. Iran and Syria); *and* prepare the ground for a definitive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian issue. In the Bush administration's strategic appraisal, the security of Israel has figured prominently from the outset. By a serendipitous route, the method for achieving it has become intimately linked with the 'war on terror.' The middle terms in the equation are the consolidation of democracy in Iraq and that accomplishment's salutary effects on political life across the region, liberalizing the 'rogue' states who also were stigmatized as 'rejectionists' in regard to peace with Israel.

Two premises lie at the heart of this linkage. Primary is the conviction that Israeli leaders, of any political coloration, cannot accept an autonomous, semi-sovereign Palestine with powers and territory that make it viable. Yet, a two-state arrangement is the only conceivable basis for an enduring peace. The supporting premise is that there is a sole circumstance in which Israelis will not feel their security under existential threat from an independent Palestinian entity. That is a Palestine that is democratic and free of revanchism fired by Islamic passion. A Palestine of that nature, it is affirmed, cannot evolve unless democracy becomes the norm among its Arab kin. For then the pressures for moderation will supplant incitement to confrontation, and the fruits of a settled, democratic society would be tantalizing and irrefutable. Left unclear was exactly what terms of settlement would produce an

outcome satisfactory enough to Palestinians as to ensure that rebellious acts dwindle as the lures of peace and prosperity work their charms. In this scenario, however, that becomes a secondary question. For events in the Holy Land will have lost most of their potential to spark vehement anti-Western passions or to radicalize Arab politics. Most important, terrorist groups in the region as a whole will have been disarmed morally and politically.

Hence, the Bush administration's comprehensive strategy for dealing with the chronic problems and threats emanating from the Middle East swells the importance of Iraq. It is the central element in an audacious plan that stakes all on success of the democracy building project in Mesopotamia. Whatever intrinsic value the political shape of Iraq has is dwarfed by the far greater weight attached to it by the American strategy. In effect, Washington has placed all its chips on success in Iraq in the expectation of being able to work its will there. By conflating the region's several problems, analytically and in policy, Bush *et al* have made a bet of historic proportions.

#### Morality, The American 'Calling' & The Democracy Project

Americans and European leaders alike freely use the language of morality in proclaiming the ideals that inspire them. They also use moral values as well as hard interests as benchmarks for evaluating the probity of their actions and those of other governments. Yet the common language does not mean that they have the same moral sensibilities or apply them in the same way. Nor do they draw their moral principles from religious and secular sources in the same measure. The issue of

morality centers around three questions: what standards of ethical conduct is it appropriate to use in evaluating the behavior of governments – in their treatment of their own citizens and in their dealings with other countries?; is the passing of moral judgment a suitable basis for setting foreign policy?; are there valid moral grounds for actively promoting democracy as the sole basis for organizing political life – ensuring peace while promoting freedom?

The United States' keen sense of being destiny's child preordained to lead the world into the light of freedom and democracy has oriented its thinking about its external relations. It is an article of faith to Americans that the country was imbued with political virtue at its founding. That idea has secular roots and religious ones. The United States is at once the embodiment of Enlightenment ideals and an expression of Providential will. American singularity can take one or another form, or combine them. Presidents as varied in their religious and intellectual persona as Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush have proclaimed as given truth the nation's mission to 'improve' the world. This theme of America as the 'chosen nation' resonates from Abraham Lincoln's declaring America to be "the last, best hope on earth" to Woodrow Wilson's offering American leadership for "the redemption of the world" to John F. Kennedy's conjuring of "a rendezvous with destiny."[\[1\]](#) Indeed, it harks back to the very beginning. Here is Thomas Paine: "America is its own mistress and can do what it pleases....America is a new character in the universe. She started with a cause divinely right....The cause of America is in great measure the cause of all mankind."[\[2\]](#) None of this rhetoric strikes

most Americans as odd or strained. American civic religion easily shades into a civic millennialism.<sup>[3]</sup> The current incumbent of the White House is exceptional in casting the American purpose in eschatological terms. He has pronounced his conviction that “the liberty we prize is not America’s gift to the world, it is God’s gift to humanity” – with America as his vessel.<sup>[4]</sup> His public remarks are suffused with evangelical references to the US being “called” by the “Maker of Heaven” who has imparted to the United States “a visible direction set by liberty and the Author of Liberty.” In so boldly dedicating the United States to acting as the agent of a higher power, in interpreting American exceptionalism as carrying a moral obligation to champion the forces of freedom against those of tyranny and terror, the President aligns himself with those who have seen the United States as fulfilling its destiny through activism rather than as passive model of political virtue.<sup>[5]</sup> Little attention was paid whether that higher power is a generic god, the Christian God or Allah as envisaged by Muslims. That ambiguity has exacerbated widespread skepticism as to American political and economic ends and purposes.

The missionary version of America’s pre-destined role as world savior acquires a righteous dimension from being suffused with religious belief. But its more secular counterparts, which lacked explicit religious imagery, were no less zealous. Surely, American foreign policy during the Cold War did not suffer from a shortage of zeal or righteous passion inspired by a sense of mission in performing its fated task. The idea that American foreign policy serves a selfless cause transcending any crass particular interest of its own is confirmed, in American eyes, by its record of service on behalf of

freedom around the world.<sup>[6]</sup> It follows that the United States has both the discernment and the right, indeed duty as many say, to make moral judgments and to act on them. His evocative language has apocalyptic overtones. The President himself is forthright in declaring “We are in a conflict between good and evil, and America will call evil by its name.”<sup>[7]</sup> Bush’s oratory combines a Methodist theology of personal transformation with a Calvinist divine plan, laced by dollops of Pentecostal end-times eschatology. It has been argued that it all has a touch of contrivance.<sup>[8]</sup> Whether, and to what degree, a conscious construction, the rhetoric resonated powerfully with a large slice of the American public and evoked scorn only in isolated pockets of the body politic. There is no actual or conceivable counterpart in Europe.

The annual reports of the State Department pronouncing on sins and transgressions of everyone else conform to this mindset. The American drive to judge, to pronounce and to chastise is unsettling to most Europeans, and Middle Easterners, on two counts. First, it implicitly devalues the moral convictions of other nations while routinely implying that they have baser motives. Second, it is seen as simplistic in its facile assessments of right and wrong, the good and the bad. American unilateralism of moral judgment is precursor to the imposition of American views in identifying malefactors and meting out punishment. Belief in its more finely honed moral instincts reinforces the claim to superior political judgment. The absence of agreement from allies on interpretation or prescription gives pause only insofar as it has practical consequences. The turnabout in Washington’s mode of address to ‘old Europe’ was a matter of expediency unaccompanied by any new-found modesty in



assessing its own wisdom or moral authority. Given this degree of certitude, it is natural that American policy-makers should resist the restraints associated with formal multilateralism. That attitude leads some others to conclude, as did former French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine, that “the United States lacks the aptitude to accept a partnership that is other than momentary or limited.”<sup>[9]</sup> The inability of Europe to speak in one voice and to act in concert prevents the realization of any aspiration to address the United States as anything like an equal, as it does on trade and commercial matters. EU disunity in turn emboldens American leaders to indulge their inclination to build partnership on a selective basis.<sup>[10]</sup>

The moral, philosophical and historical elements of American optimism are accompanied by an instrumental optimism. There is an American propensity to see life as a continuing string of challenges to ingenuity and applied reason whose solution amounts to another step on the way to a better life – be it individual or collective, material or moral. The ‘can-do’ ethic is quintessentially of the United States, as is the term itself. The dedication to reconstruction of post-Saddam Iraq on a foundation of democratic politics and market economics is in line with this mentality. To take on the formidable task of remaking a society with which there are no historical ties or cultural and religious affinities requires a self-confidence and a belief in social engineering that no European country could muster – or even would dream of. The rejoinder made by architects and supporters of the Iraqi enterprise to their doubting critics was to refer them to the great postwar successes in Germany and Japan. Basic differences of background and circumstance were fudged in keeping with an American

disposition to downplay the significance of national peculiarities – except America’s own. We are reminded of Shakespeare’s rendering of Henry V’s admonition to his bishops as the invasion of France loomed:

“Now we are well resolved; and by God’s help,  
And yours, the noble sinews of our power,  
(Iraq) being ours, we’ll bend it to our awe”

The last line is equally prescient: “Or break it all to pieces”[\[11\]](#)

### The Greater Middle East Initiative

The grandiose Greater Middle East Initiative was designated as the omnibus vehicle for effecting a political transformation of the region. The moral righteousness attached to the strategy created handicaps as well as advantages in consciously infusing democracy promotion with a supra-political meaning. Washington’s designated vehicle for democracy promotion suffered from that handicap from the outset. The Bush administration’s launch of its signature program for the region met with a frosty response from governments in the region and unconcealed skepticism from most European governments – in part because of the inflated rhetoric accompanying it. The latter were taken aback by what they saw as the latest display of Washington’s audacity in mounting a campaign for radical, speedy political change. Europeans also were peeved by the lack of prior consultation. Slighting those friendly governments who were visualized as partners in the enterprise looked as counterproductive as neglecting to consult with those who would be objects of America’s reformist intentions. Most, in Europe and in the Middle East, worried about a backlash that could stiffen resistance to the calls for liberalization from within Arab societies while exposing indigenous reformers to charges that they were agents of the

United States. Too, the European Union members were distressed by Washington's disregard of their own, low-key efforts, via the Barcelona Process, to open a dialogue on moves toward more open societies and accessible politics.

The original version of the plan leaked to the Arabic newspaper *al-Hayat* in February 2004, provoking sharp reactions. A modified set of proposals for the Bush administration's Greater Middle East Initiative renamed the Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative (BMENA), was presented to the G-8 governments at their June summit in Sea Island, Georgia in June where it won general acceptance. The outcome of extensive discussions, and strenuous efforts to overcome recalcitrance in Berlin and Paris, the new plan was presented as a common enterprise. The joint communiqué declared that:

**"We the leaders of the G8 are mindful that peace, political, economic and social development, prosperity and stability in the countries of the Broader Middle East and North Africa represent a challenge which concerns us and the international community as a whole. Therefore, we declare our support for democratic, social and economic reform emanating from that region...We commit ourselves today to a Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the governments and peoples of the (region)...This partnership will be based on genuine cooperation with the region's governments, as well as business and civil society representatives to strengthen freedom, democracy, and prosperity for all."**[\[12\]](#)

The EU had an established program of encouraging reform minded groups in the region. It came under the heading of the Barcelona Process, so named for the initiative launched in the Catalan city in 1995. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership christened at that Conference has as its stated purpose strengthening the EU's relations with the countries of the *Mashriq* and *Magreb* through an array of cultural, economic and political activities. Tutoring in the principles and working of a liberal

democratic polity has been one of its most prominent. Against this background, the question Europeans posed for themselves was: would their low-key efforts be energized by association with the United States' newly proclaimed Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI), or might they be jeopardized in the highly charged atmosphere created by heavy-handed American actions in Iraq? The administration in Washington belatedly did recognize that its preemptory approach had unnecessarily alienated Arab leaders and undercut potential European allies. Agreement in principle on a more modulated set of policies eased tensions and seemed to lay the basis for the EU and the United States to work in tandem. Yet, there remained serious issues as to the compatibility of perspectives and approaches.

They were accentuated by President Bush's 2005 inaugural speech calling for an expansion of freedom into the darkest corners of the world. Most Europeans, as well as pro-western Arab governments, were given reason to ask how much convergence there was, in thinking and action, with the American plan by Bush had proclaimed it "the policy of the United to seek the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in the world."[\[13\]](#) His fervent appeal seemed to commit the United States to a global crusade. Many outside the United States found it unrealistic and quixotic. The exhortation might be a moral call to arms or a literal one. In either case, it was met with the consternation in the European capitals.[\[14\]](#) Yet they could not reject out of hand the President's warning that "if whole regions of the world remain in despair

and grow in hatred, they will be recruiting grounds for terror, and that terror will stalk America and other free nations for decades.”[\[15\]](#)

## Europe

European officials confronted a set of interlocking questions.

- ❑ What are the similarities and differences in European and American attitudes toward fostered democracy promotion? Are they in accord on suitable modes of approach?
- ❑ What are reasonable terms for the process of value transfer, what indigenous modifications of Western practice are to be expected and what practical consequence might they have?
- ❑ Is there a differentiated perception of the United States and Europe that stems from America’s multiple interventions in the Middle East that points to an independent, if parallel, European program?

Europeans have had to reflect on how and why they should align themselves with the United States, and where they must part company. As one European analyst summed it up, “if opposition is impossible, unconditional support is inconceivable.”[\[16\]](#)

Europeans could not decline to associate themselves with the goal. After all, to allow themselves to appear blasé about autocratic rule and its malign effects would be to deny their own political birthright. All the same, they were more sensitive to the unwanted consequences of setting in motion forces that could destabilize strategic partners while opening the way for virulently anti-Western elements to gain power via the ballot box, e.g. in Saudi Arabia where fundamentalists would be the odds-on favorite in any fair and open election.

Therefore, they counseled flexibility to Washington and made flexibility a *leitmotif* their own approach. Flexibility might help to advance the purposes of democracy promotion in terms sensitivity both to local political circumstances and to

timing. There are moments of greater and lesser susceptibility to external influences and well meant symbolic acts. No ideal time is identifiable – especially since we (the Europeans anyway) are talking of a long-term process, not a specific action. That said, some moments are more conducive than others to a publicized initiative. What is to be avoided above all, in stimulating a reflexive negative reaction because passions evoked by the region's multiple conflicts, the American invasion of Iraq foremost among them, were running high. Moreover, it is an open question as to whether the same assessment is made by political elites and the general populace in Muslim countries.

There is much ambiguity as to how leaders (and other political elites) of target governments perceive the motivations of would-be Western political benefactors. Do they deconstruct the concept and reality of democracy to fit their political understanding and conceptions of public life in their own societies? What do they see as their domestic interests, their interests in ties with the West and their interests in reconciling the two?

There was the discomfoting reality that the multiple American interventions, direct and indirect, in the Middle East had 'queered the pitch' against all and any Western intrusions into the region. Washington's collaboration with Israel in its 2006 assault against Hezbollah (and Lebanon generally), its insensitivity to civilian casualties, and then the American-led Western embargo/boycott of the elected Hamas government in Palestine, all stoked anger across the region. Those events, punctuated by the continuing traumas of Iraq, has meant that the Europeans' own

human rights credentials have become hostage to the moral vagaries of American behavior, to some unknowable degree. That line of analysis strengthened the case for a parallel European strategy for encouraging democratization in the Middle East rather than one integrated with the American effort.

The tacit conclusion of the intra-European debate was that Europe's ideals and interests together dictated the Europeans – individually and through the EU – align itself, somehow, with the American effort to encourage the opening and liberalization of Arab/Muslim societies. The coalescence of support for such a project, and consensus on how to execute it, however, could not ensure a smooth partnership on a common action program. Some argued that, if indeed “the United States has become so toxic in the Arab world, other parts of a differentiated West will have to take the lead.”[\[17\]](#)

The Barcelona Process, in its institutional expression MED, looks on the surface as being the natural vehicle for a stronger affirmation of a more expansive European Union role in advancing liberal reform along the Mediterranean's Muslim littoral. Yet, there has been a widespread feeling that the initiative had stagnated, even as a significant amount of economic assistance went southward. The web of ties has grown denser over the tens years since its inception in 1997. As for political exchanges, though, it is generally accepted that they are more meaningful at the bilateral level. The legacy of colonial relationships reinforced by geography and trade flows is the evident reason. The dilemma of how to ‘help’ politically stems from the hard reality that 1) where an internal situation has become fraught, as in Algeria,

there is little of value that outside parties can do; and 2) where acute conflicts with geo-strategic implications exist, as in Palestine and Lebanon, the Europeans are relegated to onlookers or auxiliaries to an American show.[\[18\]](#) This truth holds notwithstanding the earnest French attempts to be a mediator in Beirut or the EU's disproportionate financial contribution to keeping the Palestinian Authority economically afloat.

The stasis in the EU's Good Neighbour program for the Mediterranean was underscored by President Nicolas Sarkozy's much heralded plan for a Union of the Mediterranean. This French conception was vague on substance. Its striking innovation was a proposed restriction on the European membership to those countries bordering the Mediterranean. Funding would be provided by all the EU 27 members. Predictably, Sarkozy's brainchild met with a lukewarm response from northern European states, Germany's Angela Merkel leading the critics. A classic community compromise was reached at a Ministerial meeting on March 13, 2008. The Barcelona process was slated to be "upgraded," and "revitalized" in a relaunch by the European Union as a single entity.[\[19\]](#) Dubbed 'The Barcelona Process – Union for the Mediterranean,' the program is slated to have a small secretariat to help coordinate projects. The Commission moved quickly to take hold of the reins, thereby blunting France's ambition to head a new, autonomous structure. Its recommendations were confirmed in the official launching of the new model in Paris on July 13 amidst much fanfare amplified by heralds of the French presidency of the EU assumed 13 days earlier. Significant enhancement of European influence on Middle Eastern political



development looks unrealistic. Nothing basic in the equation has changed. The record indicates that in matters of foreign policy, the EU is not a force multiplier. When it comes to 'soft power,' it is the community as success story rather than as agent that it is most impressive. The value of skillful democracy promotion can increase. However, that is an additive process, i.e. the cumulative, hopefully complementary programs and initiatives of individual countries.

Europeans' hesitancy about throwing themselves wholeheartedly into the project is widespread. For they too confront a two-fold dilemma, one of self-identity and one of external policy. Pride in their signal accomplishment of building a harmonious Europe against the grain of all its history leads to mixed feelings about whether it can be replicated elsewhere. On the one hand, their experience supports belief in a set of radical propositions: that former bitter enemies can be reconciled; that transnational cooperation can be institutionalized; and that sectarian differences need not stand in the way of nurturing common bonds. The transformative power of the EU as idea and practice is impressive. Yet, the resulting heightened a sense of 'Europeaness' also sharpens the distinction between their post-modern societies and the swirl of passion – religious, ideological, nationalist – that still dominates politics elsewhere, especially in the Muslim world. The alien nature of those forces evokes both fear and sense of cultural distance. Growing comprehension can have the effect of reinforcing both. In this regard, the difference from Americans' optimism and doctrinal faith in their power to change the world for the better is evident. At

question is self-confidence, and confidence in the wider relevance of one's own experience.

This implicit application of differential standards is not an expression of either expediency or moral relativism. Rather, it expresses an instinctive caution as to the possibly unsettling effects of imposing from without political ideals that ignore history, culture and existing mores. Europeans do not feel they must observe a categorical imperative to judge, instruct and lead others in campaigns of moral uplift. That is America, not Europe. Post-modern Europe's moral sensibility is humanistic. It is uneasy with grand formulations. Too, it is leery that impulsive, premature exercises in democracy building can open the way to rabid sectarian forces whose commitment to democratic forms is opportunistic. The issue to be examined is whether the prevailing European attitude is comprehensible to elites in the Greater Middle East and what bearing their perceptions have on receptivity to European initiatives in support of democracy.

Most Europeans find unpersuasive this belief in the pliability of societies and, therefore, the swiftness with which they can be transformed. History has instilled in them the conviction that the past casts its shadow over the present in ways that set bounds on how far and how fast enduring change can be made, however desirable it may be. The United States, in a sense, was "born against history." Its founding as a democratic republic was a break from all past experience on a virgin territory distant from the old centers of civilization. Europeans have lived enveloped by their all too eventful history. It is true that the shattering events of the twentieth century opened

a way for them to change profoundly their ways of interacting. Signal success in building a transnational community has relegated national rivalry to the football pitch or commercial marketplace. The European Union was made possible by the concatenation of the rising Soviet threat from the East, the benign protection offered by the United States, and the high order of statesmanship provided by a remarkable cadre of European leaders. Their collective enterprise was a self-conscious break from the past. European history was as much the common enemy that galvanized political will as was the Soviet Union. If America in the late eighteenth century was born against others' history, Western Europe in the mid-twentieth century succeeded in liberating itself from its own history.

Their self-identities, however, remain different. Americans see themselves not only as having been born in a condition of enlightenment but as being accorded the mission of lighting the path for the rest of the world. The United States' exceptionalism lies in its superior virtue with the obligations attendant upon it.[\[20\]](#) Whether as model or agent, the country's destiny is fulfilled abroad as well as at home. Respect, admiration and ultimately emulation are presumed to conform to the natural order of things. Europe lacks an analogous sense of mission. It was not anointed by Providence or Destiny to do good in the world. Their community was created arduously by pragmatic men inspired as much by dread of repeating the past as realizing a dream. Its focus was wholly introspective. Today, Europeans' pride in their signal accomplishment is tempered by the travails of the present. Leaders' aspirations tend to be limited, prosaic and close to home.[\[21\]](#)

So long as Europe's model is experienced as somehow flawed, its promotion abroad can be expected to sputter. Equally, a troubled and discordant Europe is hamstrung by a reduction in political resiliency. That is to say, readiness to embark on the venturesome project of global political engagement is measured not only in terms of available power assets (hard and soft) but also in terms of ability to run the risks and absorb the setbacks attendant upon so bold and open-ended an undertaking. A robust EU would provide mutual reinforcement of commitment and the reassurance of shared purpose for member governments. A weak, distracted EU leaves each partner to face uncertainty and danger alone. This is at a time when vulnerabilities are more acutely felt due to a heightened sense of terrorist threat at home. The resulting hesitancy about courting danger is manifest in the widespread opposition within Germany to a more aggressive role for German forces serving in ISAF. Other European governments, Britain and the Netherlands excepted, are little more prepared to place their soldiers in harm's way. Wedding principle, prudence and power in a credible, collective European foreign policy looks a distant prospect.

#### Together In Democracy Promotion?

The Europeans' dilemma in executing a joint strategy stems from the contrasting assessments most Europeans and most Americans make about what in fact they can do to promote democracy in other regions of the globe. The former generally hold to the view that democratic polities are far harder to develop than is the installation of nominal democracies.[\[22\]](#) And it is too easy to confuse the two. Without the belief that the course of human political development is preordained, that there is a liberal

teleology at work in the world, but rather that it is subject to the intricate play of complex social forces, progress in democracy building is conceived of as critically dependent on a preceding social evolution. Robert Cooper, Director-General for External and Political-Military Affairs at the EU Council, makes the point that “democracy is as much a social phenomenon as a political one....this makes the export of democracy as a packaged system difficult, and in some cases impossible. The hardware of laws, constitutions and armies can be explained and established with benign foreign help, but the software of unwritten rules has to be developed, invented and copied locally.”[\[23\]](#)

The preconditions for achieving a stable democracy are viewed as: the weakening of kin and sectarian ties relative to national citizenship; a readiness to participate in the democratic process on a reasonably fair and equitable footing; and a populace that sees not only a road to power that will give them what they want, but that the same road is open to others who may well have a different set of desires. Most critical is an acceptance of institutional and legal checks that put a break on state power – whoever wields it. Most Europeans do not share the confidence that clever constitutional architecture in itself can ensure against the victors abusing that power; nor can it prevent the rise to power of fiercely sectarian or militant fundamentalist elements. The outcome of elections in Algeria, Palestine, Iraq, Egypt and Iran fed that skepticism.

If these European premises as to the ingredients of a democratic political culture are correct, then a number of conclusions follow. One, time frames lengthen.

Therefore, ways need to be found for well-wishers to provide sustained encouragement and engagement. Two, tutelage can be a valuable assist. How though can it be provided without trespassing on the autonomy of existing authorities? Regime change, after all is the objective. But by what measure is it decided what the appropriate and effective means are, with what deference to the wishes of local rulers? In collaboration will local liberal forces? Is it the 'West,' the constellation of working democracies, the world community that does the deciding? Who directs a modulated set of programs at once congenial to the local culture and with the promise of being efficacious – democratic governments, their multilateral organizations, non-governmental organizations? Finally, if entrenching a truly democratic polity is a long-term project, how can outsiders make these contributions without trying the patience of those it implicitly is tutoring and, thereby, compromising the very enterprise of democracy-building? The answers to these questions given by the United States and diverse European governments are not likely to be identical. It remains to be seen whether they will prove to be compatible.

### NGOs

Is there a significant contribution made by NGOs – those rooted in the West, those that are natural outgrowths in target countries, and those that join the two? What are their lines of communication with public officials? Are they more culturally 'sensitive' than public officials in the West and does that enable them, thereby, to play the roles of facilitator and honest broker?

Non-governmental organizations in the international milieu are widely viewed as something new under the sun. Some indeed are, in certain respects. A common image of NGOs is that they are 'anational' – have no national identity. That implies that they are 'apolitical' insofar as they are presumed not to take instruction from any national government. While nominally true, this depiction is somewhat disingenuous. Any NGO will be viewed by most Middle Easterners as a creature of the Western world if any combination of the following characteristics are in evidence: principal personnel are westerners, principal funding comes from the west, headquarters are in a western capital, the core of the message implicitly, if not explicitly, uses western liberal democracies as the positive point of reference, and the NGO does not disavow the policies pursued by most western governments *vis a vis* Iraq, Palestine, Iran, Lebanon and Somalia. Review of this list underscores the uphill battle that NGOs involved in democracy promotion face. NGOs cannot exist, of course, in some transnational, cyber space as politically disembodied entities. As a practical matter, the ideas they espouse are Western in origin; there are no working models in the Arab Middle East. Moreover, the uncongenial – if not outright hostile – political climate there makes it exceedingly difficult for home-grown liberal movements to put down roots. They are always open to criticism that they are stalking horses for the Western powers and/or the disseminators of alien creeds.

The problem is exacerbated by the sheer number of NGOs operating in nation/state-building projects. NGO 'clutter' can have self-defeating consequences. In Afghanistan as of 2008, there were over 600 organizations at work. Almost all had

their headquarters in Kabul; most had the bulk of their staff there. This physical presence added to Afghani sentiment that their country was being taken over by Westerners, the beneficial effects on the local real estate and job markets notwithstanding. Obviously, there is a serious matter of system overload. No one, though, is in a position to consolidate, 'rationalize' or simply slim down the collective NGO profile.

NGO strategies for coping with these dilemmas center on engaging in their activities as many persons from Middle Eastern countries as possible, in headquarters and/or in 'target' countries. In some countries, there is political pressure to 'delegitimize' foreign civil organizations outright. Insistence on 'native only' NGOs has been parried by Western governments whose defense has been strengthened by the policies of subsidiarity and naturalization. Ancillary measures include diversifying sources of staff and funding, steering clear of governmental sponsorship of any sort, cooperating with international organizations that have impeccable credentials, and by symbolical means associating their purposes and objectives with ideals rooted in Arab and Muslim traditions and culture, the last being most challenging. This logic is compelling for NGOs of American lineage, even if not always observed. It is less clear-cut for those that are Europe based.

The European Union seeks to project soft power via the types of programs incorporated in the Barcelona process, implicitly separating itself from the United States in image if not content. There is reason then for largely European NGOs to associate themselves with official EU activities. They can gain resources otherwise



difficult to generate. They acquire a measure of diplomatic 'protection' in trying to contact liberal political groupings and individuals in Arab countries. They may further benefit from the image of being 'non-American' as they move to cultivate those relationships. There is of course a flip side to this. Any official linkage carries the risk of an NGO being tarnished by the actions of supporting governments. This could take two forms: actions that alienate wide swaths of opinion (e.g. Palestine) diminish the status of an NGO as a well-intentioned, selfless organization; or actions that alienate governments by their seeming paternalism in presuming to judge and to instruct. It is conceivable that there is a lesser chance of this occurring through some form of indirect association with the EU that lacks a distinct political personality and whose member governments often have divergent views on matters salient to Middle Eastern countries. In this respect, the EU's very liabilities as a supranational body could become an asset for an NGO operating in its ambit.

## II. STATE OF THE DEBATE

Participants in the debate over democracy promotion in the GME now agree on the axiom that the fostering of democratic institutions and practices can succeed only if the process is sensitive to cultural and social circumstances. Those circumstances include past experiences with diverse modes of political life. Considerable discussion has addressed the issue of whether all societies are equally accommodating to democracy.[\[24\]](#) When posed in the abstract, the proposition defies validation or invalidation. There are too many intervening variables, the empirical data too varied, to allow for confident conclusions. That should not stand in

the way of a rigorous assessment of how, when and to what degree identifiable factors within a given Islamic country affect its receptivity and adaptability to democracy.

Democracy itself is composed of multiple elements. One needs to separate its different elements and then use each as a benchmark against which to gauge a given country's approximation to it. They include: the legitimization of rulers through open, competitive elections; the representation of the populace through those elected officials; legal limits on how the holders of governmental office exercise state powers; and the protection of individual human rights against abuse by political authorities. Differentiation among these components enhances the analytical value of an approach that is historically informed and culturally sensitive.

#### Political 'Maturity' & Democratic Modalities

One broadly pertinent factor to be taken into account in the assaying of democratic futures is a society's political maturity. I use the term "maturity" advisedly in the sense of acquired knowledge through experience. This is unconventional. On reflection, though, I believe it appears quite natural for a society's experience with the conduct of its public affairs should have a bearing on its capability for sustaining a political system as singular as liberal democracy. In regard to the Arab Middle East, the salient fact is that for 400 years these societies did not govern themselves. Ruling power was in the hands of the Ottoman Empire for most of the period, followed by European colonialism. The brevity of self governance has implications for democracy.

There are features of a democratic polity are particularly difficult for a politically “immature” or “inexperienced” society to adopt.<sup>[25]</sup> First, liberal democracy (representative, constitutionally grounded democracy) is the only political system that has *the individual as its cornerstone*. The legitimized holders of power positions are chosen by individual voters, who are the only legally recognized sources of popular sovereignty. In addition, the securing of individual liberties is a primary objective of formal provisions limiting what government authorities can do. An individual focused polity corresponds to the prominence of the individual as a social construct, i.e. society is constituted around the individual. This may not be exclusively so, but at the very least the individual is not entirely subsumed within social groupings. The correspondence between society and polity in this respect is a necessary condition for a liberal democracy to take root. This is not the state of affairs in nearly all of the Middle East.

The *strength of kinship structures* is one reason. *Political history* is another. The Ottomans, and their European successors, found it convenient to organize their rule around sets of relations between the imperial state and sectarian groupings, especially tribes but also: religious cults, fraternal organizations, foundations, Perpetuation, indeed at times the bolstering of those groupings, conformed to the principle of indirect rule that the ruling outsiders observed. In the case of the former, moreover, individualism hardly figured in the practices of the Sultanate itself. In the case of the latter, the British and French assiduously avoided any attempt to build political institutions in emulation of their own in their Middle Eastern mandates and

protectorates. (A practice that was not universal in British dependencies. See discussion below).

Extended, endogamous kinship structures to which individuals have a strong mutual attachment to each other and to the group is a pronounced feature of Arab societies. The full meaning is summed up in the term *Asabiyya* as elaborated by the great social historian and analyst Ibn Khaldun in the fourteenth century.<sup>[26]</sup> The essence of the concept is solidarity – with connotations of collective consciousness as well as social cohesion. Emerging from Khaldun’s interpretation of the central place held by tribe and clan in the organization and conduct of public life in the Arab world, it was postulated as “the fundamental bond of human society and the motor force of social life.”<sup>[27]</sup> *Asabiyya* as idea had the dual effect of confirming the naturalness of existing kinship solidarities and affirming their positive value. Community not only takes precedence over the individual, it is seen as providing two things crucial to individual well-being: order and a sense of collective place *cum* identity. Without community, disorder (*fitna*) arises. *Fitna* risks not only social strife but individual safety understood as a secure psychological location in the world.

Today, the term *Asabiyya* has lost some of specificity. In colloquial usage it is even employed to refer to the extended entourage around a powerful ruler. Ibn Khaldun himself foresaw with great perspicacity the emergence of ‘clientelism’ as an adjunct to strong authoritarian leader.<sup>[28]</sup> It is a phenomenon that combines elements of solidarity and interest in ways that challenge the sway of kinship networks. Indeed, we have seen this competition play out in recent times in Iraq,

between the Ba'ath party and the tribes, as well as in Syria, Jordan and Morocco. Clearly, *Asabiyya's* historical influence is undeniable and the conceptions it encapsulates are very much alive.

*Egalitarianism* is companion to individualism. Liberal democracies are egalitarian in the granting of political rights, and in the legal standing accorded individuals. This notion holds regardless of the degree of economic equality or social status. On that score, wealth distribution and social stratification vary markedly among established liberal democracies. Western societies do not have a monopoly on the idea of egalitarianism. It lies at the core of Islam as well. The concept of all being equal in the eyes of Allah is as pronounced in Muslim scripture as it is in the Judea-Christian tradition. Arguably, it has been more of a living precept in the Islamic tradition than in the former. It remains a reference mark in the collective discourse despite egregious deviations from the abstract ideal in practice.

Subordination to imperial rulers has stifled any possible move toward reifying the egalitarian principle in governance. For obvious reasons. Political egalitarianism cannot be reconciled with governing arrangements predicated on a basic inequality between the dominant ruling power and all members of the subordinate society. Furthermore, the emphasis on ascriptive groups as the building blocks of the public order assumes a differentiation both horizontal and hierarchical. Therefore, egalitarianism *per se* – like individualism – is a secondary consideration in the prevailing political discourse of the Middle East. Many people throughout the region do feel economically discontented, and deprived in the sense that the powerful take

too large a part of society's wealth for themselves. The latter is unearned and corruptly distributed; therefore, it is unjust. The notion of justice, in the Koranic tradition, refers primarily to virtue but it has a social aspect, too. 'Right' behavior in all matters, including economic dealing, is strongly enjoined. Thus, there exists a powerful impulse toward a purification of society, rather than its remaking, i.e. reform of public institutions along liberal democratic lines.

Democracy means *limited government*. That is true in the fundamental sense that the crucial role of legal stipulations in setting the powers enjoyed by office holders, along with prohibited actions, restricts the latitude of rulers. A polity so constituted is radical in the way that it places limits on what they can do. It is conservative insofar as it explicitly excludes some modes of political action by both ruler and ruled. Their formal legitimizes political institutions and practices, thereby transforming power into authority and obedience into citizen duty. In sharp contrast, imperial systems and the autocracies that succeeded them retain for the rulers significant discretionary powers as may be employed to maintain their position of dominance. Recognition of certain customary norms does represent the acceptance of some loose limits, as well as obligations. Yet such a polity leaves rulers with far wider prerogatives than they have in a formal, rule bound constitutional system – and it leaves subjects with few formal rights of citizenship. Most important, in the context of our thinking about democracy promotion, the legacy of imperial rule is the stunting of any earlier impulses that pointed away from authoritarian, highly arbitrary, forms of governance.

Moreover, the powerful lesson of the imperial experience is that a dominant/subordinate relationship is the essence of political life. It is natural and normal that an elite commands and the people obey. The derivative postulates are: (1) power differentials dictate who commands; (2) control itself legitimates rule over time; and (3) political virtue resides in the beneficent use of paternalist state power. Of Lincoln's formulation of the democratic creed – government Of the people, By the people, For the people – only the last has been pertinent in the political history of the region.

Finally, liberal democracy is unique in producing a *discontinuity of leadership*. The selection of office-holders through periodic election means that there will be a turnover among those who exercise power. Under some constitutions, term limits are specified. Leaders will always be contested. Perforce, they necessarily will be attentive to how their policies and actions affect their political fortunes. As a result, some measure of policy discontinuity accompanies discontinuity of leadership – independent of shifting judgments among rulers as to what courses of action best serve the society's needs. Here again, we detect a mismatch between the standard *modus operandi* of an imperial polity and a core feature of a democracy. The logic and outlook of the former has impressed itself on political leaders. So it has on the populace at large, too. Heirs to an imperial frame of reference, rulers feel instinctively that there is a congruence between democratic practice, on the one hand, and the uncertainties they seek to avoid as to who is in charge and what the populace can expect from their governors, on the other. These sentiments are integral to an

Islamist tradition places emphasis on the unity of the community of believers while ever on guard against anything, anyone or any idea that can lead to disorder (*fitna*).

The attitude set toward political matters that emerges can be expected to color perceptions of democracy as a construct, and of its concrete institutions. Since those attitudes are rooted in the cumulative political experience of Arab societies, it is a reasonable supposition that their political culture helps determine how they perceive conjectured reforms cast in liberal democratic terms. One hypothesis is that an awareness of the incompatibilities noted above, however abstract, could give a pronounced negative connotation to Western initiatives for the very reason that they are not associated with, and indeed appear to be a clean break from traditions uncongenial to democracy. It is possible that both responses are in evidence.

The four core components of a democratic polity are inter-related. They also are mutually dependent, but not entirely so. Or, to put it somewhat differently, one could imagine discrepancies and asymmetries. In many countries, generally free elections co-exist with the retention and use of extra-legal powers by a powerful executive. The intervening variables are: majorities responsive to minority rights; and, above all, an independent judiciary with the authority to weigh on the political process while protecting individuals' civil liberties from abuse. That was vividly on display in Pakistan over the past year. In the Pakistani case, widespread commitment to the principle of legality embodied in the courts is partially a political cultural inheritance from the British Raj, one reinforced over the ensuing 60 years by practice.



Too, there is the affinity between a law-based system of rule and Islamic traditions. (See Section III). First, the Koranic affirmation that all are equal in the eyes of Allah is universally accepted if not necessarily followed in practice. More than a vague ideal, it has greater saliency in Islamic culture than does its Christian counterpart. Second, the Law and its learned interpreters (the *ulama*) have always been honored. Indeed, one of Islam's attractions in its spread beyond the Middle East was that it promised an ordered, just framework for conducting the affairs of society. *Ulama*, experienced in Islamic law and its execution, and *qadis* (magistrates), were the agents for consolidating Islam's hold on rulers and people in Southeast and Central Asia whose first contact with the religion has been via merchants, and not warriors of the faith as in the Middle East and North Africa, and Northern India. Together, these features of Islamic legal tradition are conducive to the development of a political system that enforces the law, albeit some version of *Shari'a* law, with fairness while constraining the summary actions of rulers. It is a reasonable leap of logic and imagination to visualize how these standards could prove favorable to a legally grounded system of governance that includes the protection of civil liberties.

An additional thought, pointing in the same direction, is that the conservative effect of law redounds to the advantage of an established ruler or regime. That is to say, every legal system as a buttress of the status quo in that it stipulates what types of political action are precluded as well as those that are permitted. Violent acts, in particular, are stigmatized as beyond the pale and prohibited. Moreover, their restriction is a Koranic admonition insofar as the Book set clear conditions in which

violence is permitted as well as those in which it is prohibited. Other extra-legal actions are, too. Consequently, to the degree that the law thereby hardens political norms as to what is acceptable and unacceptable, a secure government leadership gains protection even as it may have its powers curtailed.

### III. INTERIM ASSESSMENT

By the time of this writing in **LATE 2008**, the record of the West's heightened campaign to promote democracy in the greater Middle East had become legible. More than six years of concentrated effort since the reconstitution of Afghanistan began in earnest, the contours of accomplishment and failure are clear enough for a preliminary assay. The several country specific initiatives of the strategy form a tapestry too rich in its particulars to be examined in detail. Still, certain broad conclusions can be drawn.

#### 1. *Imposing democracy from the barrel of a gun is an improbable undertaking.*

Violence is the enemy of democracy. For democracy's essence is wide agreement on the norms for conducting public life. That agreement is the basis for politics that excludes resort to coercive means. So doing presumes a basic accord that the status quo is minimally satisfactory in terms of both tolerance for the state of society and the methods for handling differences. Moreover, violence inflames passions in ways inimical to the restraint on ambition and action on which democracy relies. It propels the drive to power among victors; it stokes resentment and hopes for vengeance among losers. From a democratic perspective, each is a casualty of war.

If war is the enemy of democracy, civil strife is its nemesis. Foes - winners, vanquished, innocent victims - must live together. They cannot escape themselves, each other and the past. The deleterious effects for putting in place structures for peaceable intercourse are all the more severe where there is no previous experience of concord to look back on. In the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq, earlier periods of domestic peace were marked by autocracy or tenuous co-existence among semi-autonomous sectarian groups. The latter is true as well of Lebanon.

As for Iraq, the notion that the toppling of a noxious regime by force somehow clears the ground for building a bright new political order is belied by history. As Paul Schroeder has remarked, “some people seem to think that states and their governments are somehow fungible, replaceable – that if one is destroyed or overthrown, another can take its place – and if the state or government overthrown was evil and dangerous, anything that replaces it will be better.”[\[29\]](#) Historical experience by and large teaches otherwise.”[\[30\]](#) In this respect, Americans and most Europeans differ. Schroeder’s admonition rings true for the latter while the former tend to dismiss it as unhealthy pessimism. At work on the American side is the abundant faith in the power of enlightened thinking and good intentions, as discussed above. That optimism draws further confidence from rational techniques for mastering the human environment, social as well as physical. Technics and civilization itself are seen as inseparable.[\[31\]](#) Blueprints for state-building, and even more audaciously nation building, form part of the same mindset as do ‘smart’ weapons for fighting an insurgency, and technology for upgrading oil fields. Here, too, there is the

tenacious devotion to 'finishing what you start,' never to take 'no' for an answer, i.e. the compulsive stubbornness of the protestant ethic applied to a political project.

These are attitudes and sentiments that few Europeans share – or, indeed, can share - given their keener awareness of rationality's limits, of hopes dashed, of all that can go wrong in human enterprises, of the *evolutionary* character of social construction.

Today, the two projects of prosecuting a so-called 'war on terror' and promoting democracy go hand in hand in the minds of Washington – the foreign policy community as a whole, not just the Bush administration. The same conviction is rare across the Atlantic, all the more so with Tony Blair's departure from the scene. This truth goes far to explain the Europeans' distinct lack of enthusiasm for throwing themselves wholeheartedly into the Iraq project or the Afghan project. Rhetoric aligns itself with American declarations. Action does not. Iraq is viewed as an outright failure; in fact, a counterproductive one from the standpoint of regional stability and fighting al-Qaeda. A modicum of stability is the best they can imagine. A working democracy is unimaginable. So long as the two are conflated in official American thinking, so long as the United states judges it necessary to use military force in a non-discriminating way, there is little the Europeans can see themselves contributing to reaching a less rather than more undesirable outcome.

The Afghan situation is not identical, but similar. Western style liberal democracy seems as far-fetched there as in Iraq, even if the social and political divides run along somewhat different axes. Too, the background of thirty years of civil war

creates the very subjective conditions we noted as antithetical to the political culture of democracy. (In effect, the post-invasion strife of Iraq has compressed into five years what Afghanistan has experienced in thirty). A difference is that in the latter one can imagine a political *modus vivendi* producing a modicum of stability if one key condition were met: military suppression and political containment of the Taliban. There, an anti-terrorism policy and a state-building policy at least are on convergent tangents. That is the logic that keeps Europeans in the game.

The pieces of the current strategy may not point to democracy, as we know it, but they could lead to the order that is a precondition for it – some ways down the road. Disagreements do exist. Some European governments, Angela Merkel's prominent among them, believe that more stress must be placed on economic development and social programs in order both to cut the ground from under the Taliban and to inculcate allegiance to Karzai's government in Kabul, even if mainly as a source of welcome payoffs. Another point of debate has to do with military tactics. American reliance on firepower produces too many civilian casualties. Military culture and a doctrine of force protection persuade American leaders that it is the best (read: *only*) method to defeat an armed enemy at acceptable cost. There remains a great deal of worry that every collateral casualty results in multiple recruits for the insurgents. Moreover, while it could produce the dread that may lead some people to be obedient to the disciple of a central authority, it may do so on terms that do not auger well for a healthy democratic polity.

2. *Democracy is an organic product.*

That lapidary statement has two implications. First, it should be adapted to a local environment. Second, it fares best when cultivated by natives of that locale. These are banal truths. Yet, they are too often elided by aggressive external promoters of democracy. This is especially true in the Middle East. Understandably so. A light touch and an appreciation of socio-cultural distance mean uncertainty as to outcome and, most surely, a longish time frame. That is unacceptable when the stakes of foreign parties, the West, are high; when they see an immediate threat, i.e. transnational terrorism; and when democracy now has been posited as the *sine qua non* for ensuring a satisfactory state of affairs in the near future. Thus, we have the problem of American hyper-activism. Thus, we have the quandary of European hesitancy about what is the correct course and ambivalence about being forced by dint of circumstances to follow in the wake of America. Left to their own devices, most European leaders would concentrate on stability in the near term while making restrained attempts to encourage the lineaments of democracy, thinking and institutions.

There are a number of concrete implications. One, the physical presence of a foreign power that has taken the liberty of casting itself as the benevolent tutor in democracy tarnishes both message and messenger. No people like being dictated to by others. This is doubly so when the tutor carries with it so much negative baggage as the United States does in the Middle East. Occupation always turns opinion against the occupier. The longer, more troubled the occupation the more intense the negative reactions. Consequently, America finds itself on the horns of a dilemma in

both Iraq and Afghanistan. To achieve the stated military objectives means a wide, deep 'footprint.' Moreover, in the case of the former, the United States' long-term objective is to turn Iraq into a pliable instrument of American military and political strategy in the Greater Middle East. The public perception is that its billion dollar Raj Bhavan of an Embassy complex, 1,000 staff, four giant redesigned air bases, and economic domination are not integral to an 'imperial' design. Facts on the ground say otherwise. Most important, that is how it is seen by Iraqis. Realpolitik logic says: given the perceived security stakes, think stability and control first and put democracy promotion in a lower category. The problem is that American leaders have justified the entire enterprise in terms of bringing peace and stability to the region *via* democracy. That is the way it has been sold to the local population, to the world, to the American public and to themselves.

Displays of military prowess by external parties have the additional adverse effect of strengthening the conviction that only the powerful dictate policies and control the future. Unable to match the sheer force of the West, the United States and Israel especially, feelings of impotence nurture the dream of a savior - that is to say, the heroic figure whose steely will and inspiring mien can mobilize Muslims to thwart the foreign enemy. The keen sense of historical grievance, of the mythical past, and the lack of confidence in Islamic societies to build power through sustained effort a la China contribute to the living dream of the man on a white stallion. The point is not just to regain respect and righteousness for their own worth, but rather to regain the might that can give them tangible meaning. That calls for a hero. It is a

yearning that too readily opens the way for a demagogue. Democracy offers but a pale substitute.

3. *Democracy promotion is not a laboratory experiment that can be run, and rerun, as strikes one's fancy.*

A second implication of the "organic" proposition is that outside parties should avoid meddling in local politics once a constitution is in place. Elections must be free of interference by the tutelary power (where there is one) if they are to be true expressions of the popular will and seen as such. This rule has been routinely violated by the United States in Iraq. Washington provided money and technical advice to its favorites, especially the secular coalition led by Aliya Alawi. To no avail. The American Ambassadors, Khalilzad and Crocker, have been constant players in the innermost councils so as to broker leadership deals congenial to the United States. Those efforts are punctuated by the hortatory visits of senior officials from Washington. In April 2008, it inspired the intricate stratagem to deny the party of Muqtada al-Sadr the right to present candidates for regional elections later that year. Any short term success that may be registered has the negative spin off of compromising the very democratic process that is the centerpiece of longer term hopes for the country. It undercuts the principle of free and equal access to the polls. Moreover, those wielding governmental power lose authority and legitimacy. As a result, the underlying tension between security aims and democracy promotion is exacerbated. For Iraq, that means that any government that has broad popular support will be inclined to show the United States the door. Any government that



accepts the status of *de facto* protectorate will not have broad popular support. That truth has been demonstrated by the al-Maliki government's comprehensive rejection of Washington's proposed terms a Status of Forces Agreement and Baghdad's insistence on regaining sovereign powers while setting a date certain for the removal of American forces.

4. *In short, power politics and democracy promotion do not mix.*

Finally, the 'organic' imperative of democracy development dictates that election results be accepted as authoritative, however unpalatable the winners may be. Democracy at the polls is not a principle you can discard when inconvenient. For an external party to do so means delegitimizing the very process one has lauded as the key to self representation and accountable government. This is what the United States has done in the Middle East, repeatedly. In Iraq, it has played favorites in the various ways just indicated. In Lebanon, it strives to depict Hezbollah as a non-Lebanese tool of Syria while backing Israeli and Lebanese attempts to suppress or to curb it. In Algeria in the early 1990s, it gave tacit support to the government's cancellation of scheduled elections in expectation of a victory by Islamist parties. More recently, it lifted the pressure on President Mubarak of Egypt when the Muslim Brotherhood's popularity became evident. Most egregious, is its attitude toward the electoral success of Hamas in the occupied Palestinian territories. Washington has been complicit with the Israeli government to annul the results of the free elections that gave Hamas a surprise victory over Fatah. Going well beyond withholding formal recognition, the United States actively has cooperated in a multifaceted campaign to

topple the government. The strategy has included imprisonment of legislators and ministers, the draconian blockade of Gaza that punishes civilians, and the arming of Fatah militias for an armed challenge that failed when preempted by Hamas fighters. The strategy culminated in Washington's complicity in the bloody Israel assault of January 2009. In Palestine, both American interests and the idea of democracy have fallen victim to ill-conceived, seemingly expedient actions. Now it must contend with pervasive regional feelings that America is a hypocrite.

To entangle support for democratic process with outcome preferences is to distort the very meaning of the political ideas supposedly being advocated. Perhaps the gravest risk is to reinforce already rampant impressions that elections are appealing only because they open an avenue to gaining power for oneself, one's clan, one's sect, one's associates. It is a zero-sum contest – winner take as much as he can. Due process, legal constraint, self-imposed restraint, coalescing for the common good – all these notions come less naturally. They are often subordinate to partisan ambition. Meddling by an external party to favor one group or another confirms belief that this is what democracy really is all about. To go a step further in punishing uncongenial winners strengthens the cynicism.

**5. *External parties should recognize that cultural distance is a serious handicap.***

Societies differ in some fundamental attributes. Cognitive maps of how the world, and important segments of it, work are not the same. Nor are belief systems, historical experience, stratification systems and religious affiliations the same. That is

why the saga of democracy is marked by a diversity of trajectories. That is why democracy of today in any given country is not what it was yesterday or may be tomorrow. That also is why the forms and modalities of what we call constitutional or liberal democracies do not match exactly. Prudence, therefore, is called for. It is a mistake to think in terms of templates; even worse to think of force feeding a country's populace with a one size fits all model.

An extreme form of the last is visible in Iraq. The evidence to date is that for a foreign country volitionally to take custody of an ancient, complex society that is part of a distant and alien civilization is a recipe for failure. It is self-delusion to believe that America in Iraq, or in any power roughly analogous situation, can mold it to the former's specifications. All the less so when other, self-interested purposes are being served as the expense of neighbors who have their own direct and immediate interests. This bespeaks a hubris that leads to actions that are antithetical to the light hand and prudence that are prerequisite for constructive engagement in support of democracy.

*6. Democratic development presumes a coherent society and a competent state.*

That hard lesson should have been learned from experience in much of the post-colonial world, by no means in the Middle East alone. So, too, it is instructive to review the history of established democracies where we have a long record of the interplay among nationalism, state building and democracy. In all cases except the United States, a central state apparatus antedated moves toward democracy. Looking at current cases, it is doubtful that Afghanistan ever has had such, even during the

period of communist rule and Soviet occupation. The closest approximation, ironically, was the Taliban regime that existed for six years. Iraq had a fragmented, weak state headed by a British imposed monarch from Arabia until it fell under Ba'athist dictatorship. The structures of governance they built were dismantled by the American occupation. The term 'IRAQ' itself should be read as a pronoun with multiple antecedent nouns. The consequence is that the West finds itself committed to constructing viable democracies where the cards are stacked against it, on this count alone. Viable states do exist elsewhere in the Middle East. All are under authoritarian rule with the possible exception of Lebanon. The historical reasons for this and the implications are examined in Part III. State building *per se* is an accomplished fact. It is the transformation of non-democratic polities that is the challenge.

*Iran* stands out in the region in two respects. First, there is the deep experience of a strong state *and* a coherent society with a pronounced sense of collective identity that dates back through recorded history. Sharp regime ruptures, such as those that occurred twice in the twentieth century, did not obviate that salient fact; nor did the waxing and waning of central power through the centuries. While self-conscious, intermittently restless sectarian and ethnic minorities exist (\*Kurds, Baluchis, Azeris), they pose no serious challenge to Tehran's position in the country's political life.<sup>[32]</sup> The Islamic Revolution of 1979 certainly transformed the structure and legitimizing basis of the central government. Yet, the governmental apparatus and its links to provincial structures were not destroyed.<sup>[33]</sup> They were adapted and

reconstituted to accommodate the radically new institutions of the Guardian Council and the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini (now Ayatollah Khameni). Tradition, and the new Constitution, conceivably could be adjusted to shift executive power toward the elected, and thereby accountable, President. In other words, a competent state that is more than merely a creature of a dictatorial clique is an asset for democracy development.

An electoral process that allows for competitive candidates, and whose results are observed, sets Iran apart from most Middle East countries. Candidates are vetted, indeed with increasing stringency, to prevent avowed opponents of the regime, and now most reformers, from running for the legislature (*Majlis*) and the Presidency. There is media censorship, too. The principle of popular choice, however circumscribed, is respected – as Katami’s double success indicated, despite the Guardian Council’s preference for someone more conservative, indicated. Mahmoud Ahmedi-nejad’s victory in 2005 over two rounds of balloting was based on a fair count, according to most observers., albeit of an election with a restricted set of candidates.

By *a coherent society* I mean a society wherein the primary allegiance is to the country, i.e. the comprehensive social unit within its political boundaries. Plural identities and allegiances are compatible with working democracies. A casual survey confirms that proposition. Sects, clans, tribes, associations of all kinds are not in themselves antithetical to social cohesion, as witness India. It is where they compete with the larger collectivity in terms of loyalty, obligation - and are resistant to the setting/observance of common rules essential to a reasonably integrated socio-

politico-economic entity - that particularisms militate against political coherence. On this score, there is great variation in the Middle East. It ranges from the tight bonds of national cohesion that characterize Tunisia and Egypt to a fractured Lebanon. It is largely a coincidence that the two places where the West is engaged in hands-on democracy installation, Afghanistan and Iraq, are close to the 'incoherent' end of the continuum.[\[34\]](#)

### Practical Lessons

- ❑ Act and speak *sotto voce*
- ❑ Keep as low a profile as circumstances permit
- ❑ Bear this in mind before making decisions that could lead to an active, physical presence
- ❑ Recognize that the use of violent force has an enormous downside
- ❑ Encourage local initiative wherever possible; make that 'possible' broad and elastic
- ❑ Anything that weakens central authority is liable to prove a liability
- ❑ Do not underestimate the intrinsic contradictions between those ends served by stability and democracy promotion
- ❑ Be sensitive to cultural distinctiveness
- ❑ Deconstruct the concept and practice of democracy so as to avoid the inclination to advertise and to promote only one fully formed model of democracy (See Part IV)
- ❑ Recognize that the modeling of a practicing democracy remains the West's strongest asset

### IV. LEGACY OF THE COLONIAL EXPERIENCE

All Muslim countries experienced colonial rule for long periods of time extending into the middle of the twentieth century. They did not gain independence until after World War II; in the case of the predominantly Muslim former republics of the defunct USSR until 1991. In most of the Arab Middle East and North Africa, colonial control by European powers superseded centuries of subjugation within the Ottoman Empire. Morocco was the exception in the Maghreb. Across the whole

expanse of the Islamic world, only the Turks and the Iranians escaped some form of control by external powers. In the Arab lands, indigenous responsibility for political affairs was historically so distant as to leave no noticeable imprint on the forms and functions of political institutions. Equally, it was a condition that discouraged an engagement, theological and intellectual, with questions of ruler and governance.

This lengthy political dependency heightened the challenge of constituting authoritative governmental structures once independence was gained. Building institutions and asserting leadership in terms that conferred legitimacy in the minds of the populace was complicated by the multiplicity of kinship networks within the national boundaries set arbitrarily by imperial rulers. Often, kin rivalries or sectarian rivalries among various Islamic sects had been actively exploited in strategies of 'divide and rule.' This was strikingly the case in Algeria, and then in Syria under the French mandate. Iraq, under Ottoman suzerainty is instructive for yet another reason.[\[35\]](#) There, the difficulties of superimposing an imperial order on a fractious, tribal society were daunting if not intractable. The situation was so onerous that it led the Sublime Porte to delegate responsibility to Mamluke auxiliaries who, for sixty years in the seventeenth century, established their own dominion. With the coming of independence after WW II, Arab countries throughout the Middle East reacquired their political free will, in principle. But this newfound freedom did not leave them with a blank sheet on which could be inscribed the constitution of either avowedly modern institutions or working models of arrangements rooted in the past. Colonialism left a residue that could not easily be swept aside. The imperial rule by

European powers imposed on Muslim societies in the Middle East was, in most instances, indirect - Algeria being the outstanding exception. It worked through pre-existing kinship structures, and archaic dynasties dating from the pre-colonial times e.g. the Bey of Tunis; the Moroccan and Egyptian monarchies; the Emirs in the Gulf principalities.

Local governing mechanisms, local administration, and sectarian communities were left largely intact, as were legal codes. The mesh of subtle links that in many places knitted a web of ties between state and society, central authority and tribe, city and countryside, survived the colonial experience. That meant a perpetuation of extended kinship lineages that qualified and constrained the powers of central authority. In some countries – Iraq, Syria, Algeria - it encouraged the inheritors of imperial ruler to strengthen and to extend the scope of their formal powers by resorting to autocratic means in order to break the hold of traditional social structures on their members. Thus, the drive to development and national aggrandizement seen everywhere in the post-colonial world, tended to be autocratic in Islamic countries. Accountable, representative government bound by working constitutions found hospitable soil neither where traditional social structures and forms of political authority survived nor where new elites seized power dedicated to a process of enforced development that would be directed from the top.

Ottoman rule was distinctive in the high degree of autonomy granting sectarian communities to manage their communal affairs. Matters directly affecting family and kin came under the authority of courts mandated to adjudicate them according to local (ascriptive) legal codes. This was the essence of the *millet* system.



Those communities, whether defined in religious or kinship terms, were also had the right/privilege/obligation of representing their communities' interests before Ottoman officials. The effect of having the *millet* system in place for centuries was to ensconce the principle, as well as the practice, of communalism within the political culture of the Middle East.

In the interwar period, the lands of the collapsed Ottoman Empire saw the sponsored founding of royal dynasties by the new European wielders of imperial power. Great Britain in particular reconfigured the political map of the Middle East to suit its own political convenience. Britain created the country of Transjordan from scratch, placing on the throne the Hashemite Abdullah. His brother, Faisal, was ensconced in Baghdad. The Hashemites had held the exalted position of *Sharifs*, guardians of the holy places of Mecca and Medina, under the Ottomans. They were evicted from that position as part of the upheaval on the Arabian peninsula that saw the British backed House of Saud establish a dynasty and dominion over the disparate tribes of Arabia. It was in compensation that the two Hashemites were bestowed with kingships in newly minted Jordan and Iraq. It was Faisal's grandson and namesake who was overthrown in 1958 by a cabal of Iraqi army officers allied with the secular Ba'ath party. The military regime's lineal successor is Saddam Hussein who took power in 1979. None of the three post-Ottoman monarchies installed by the British was encumbered by the type of elected assemblies and independent judiciaries that were central to the political tutelage accorded older colonies in South Asia and Africa. In this, Jordan and Iraq matched the pattern set in Egypt. There, too, Britain found it suitable to exercise political control through an unconstitutional monarchy

whose former allegiance to the Ottomans had been transferred intact to the British in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The analogous case in French rule was represented by the Bey of Tunis, retained as a figurehead when they elbowed aside the Ottomans to establish their protectorate.

French practice in the Middle East in the Syrian and Lebanese mandates it acquired through the notorious Sykes-Picot Treaty, which divided the Ottoman spoils between France and Britain after WW I, was similar. During the interwar period, France exercised control through local elites rooted in long established kin and sectarian associations. They skillfully manipulated elements of these highly segmented societies to prevent the emergence of independence movements that could either transcend or coalesce traditional forces. Favoring Maronite Christians and selected Druze clans in Lebanon, and in Syria playing off Sunnis, Alawites, Shi'a and Kurds against each other, the French adapted the Ottoman mode of indirect rule to their own needs. France's colonial strategy in all its dependencies promoted the acculturation of a narrow Franco-philic elite, its self-proclaimed 'mission civilisatrice'. It assiduously avoided creating facsimiles of the liberal Third Republic as the foundation for some eventual self-rule. In this sense, its practices in the Maghreb and Middle East conformed to the imperial pattern it followed elsewhere. Therefore, in the case of French colonialism, the form of colonial rule does not offer illuminating geographical or cultural comparisons. But its very character is a factor that helps to explain the non-democratic direction that political evolution has taken in those portions of the Muslim world that came under France's political control.

By contrast, the forms of indirect rule followed by the British in the Middle East were at variance with their policy in other parts of their empire. That difference is noteworthy for our analysis of how the colonial experience affected the evolution of political systems within the Islamic world. Trajectories can be compared to discern parallels or divergences with former colonial dependencies in other cultural regions which experienced a different form of colonial rule. There is indeed a correlation. All of the countries that Britain ruled via pliant traditional monarchies (and those where it installed a dynasty) have tended toward autocracy after having gained independence. One finds neither functional republics nor truly constitutional monarchies where British colonial rule was based on traditional, non-democratic political structures.

In those places where Britain exercised direct rule, as in South Asia, they built elements of the political infrastructure for constitutional democracies. Legislatures (appointed, elective or a mix of the two), legal limitations on executive authority, judiciaries with a measure of autonomy, and an independent press were patterned after the British model. While their powers were circumscribed to preserve imperial prerogatives, these indigenous institutions progressively assumed substantial authority. India, to cite the most fully developed example, was largely self-governing with regard to the routine management of its internal affairs by the 1930s. Politicians, legislators, administrators, and jurists had the experience of working a quasi-democratic system. (We develop this thesis below in reference to Pakistan, Bangladesh and Malaysia).

## The Post-Independence Colonial Factor

The colonial factor is present even after independence, in diluted form. Ties between the former colony and former mother country persist to varying degrees and in various forms. The British Commonwealth is the most institutionalized expression of those communalities – of language, culture, and political values – that are the legacy of the colonial experience. Although the Commonwealth in its current state has been emptied of any significant meaning as a diplomatic formation (much less as a tacit alliance), and is greatly diminished as an economic association, it lives on. Seemingly anachronistic, the Commonwealth nonetheless stands as a testament to enduring affinities. A reprimand issued by the annual meeting of heads of state singling out a member for behavior that violates norms of good political conduct may have no official standing and the accompanying sanctions are mild in the extreme. Yet, even losing their sting, rebukes from the Commonwealth fraternity are not shrugged off lightly. The fact that it is still felt as an embarrassment attests to a subjective reality that serves, to some immeasurable degree, to incline leaders of former colonial states to observe the norms of constitutional democracy – the common creed of Commonwealth members.

The francophone counterpart to the Commonwealth differs insofar as the element of political culture in the make-up of the body is less pronounced. The binding ties are more linguistic and cultural. Current attitudes conform to the aforementioned French colonial practice which refrained from any consequential attempt to implant democratic institutions that would be a standing legacy of their

enlightened rule. Overall, former French colonies register a lower score on the democracy indices than do former British colonies. Interestingly, there is no serious disparity between those who are predominantly Muslim societies and those predominantly non-Muslim. France's active intervention - often entailing military force - in the politics of several of its former sub-Saharan African dependencies has aimed primarily at ensuring stability by bolstering governments in power rather than fostering democratic institutions. In recent years, it has become both more inhibited about overt intervention and less inhibited about commenting on failings in the area of human rights. In Algeria, it has worked towards a peaceful settlement between the government and the radical Islamist groups that have taken up arms against it. Elsewhere in the Mahgreb, Tunisia's move toward restricting civil liberties has been viewed as unfortunate but largely dictated initially by the internal threat from radical fundamentalist groups that the government faces. However, Paris is circumspect in its criticisms, careful to avoid any estrangement from countries whose special ties to France it continues to prize.

### The 'Development' Challenge

Newly independent Middle Eastern states, in the postwar period, experienced the contradictory impulses of other states emerging from colonial domination. The institutions and cultures of their now departed masters lingered. The impassioned desire to liberate themselves from imperial influences by affirming their own character pointed to a jettisoning of alien modes and methods. How to do so,

however, when that inheritance was closely associated with the might and 'modernity' that was seen as the *sine qua non* of national self-realization?

It was a psychological challenge, as well as a political and economic one, to develop the lineaments of a competent national-state in the mode of their past rulers. Too close an emulation created the strain of sensing oneself trying to develop while sheathed in another society's skin. Yet, to follow a self-consciously indigenous course meant foregoing much that had practical utility. It may, indeed, have been logically inescapable to model the imperial power to a considerable degree – even while fighting against it all along the way. In addition, there was also the attraction of those things that appeared valuable for the very reason that they were attributes of the superior power that had managed to subjugate you. Thus, the multiple strains of 'recovering' a distinct socio-cultural personality while engaged in the process of transforming that very heritage.

Some of the strains produced in coming to terms with the power of more innovative Western societies had been felt even under imperial rule. That was not so, though, at the political and governmental levels. There, opportunities were either severely limited or non-existent. Those persons who had participated in imperial governance did so in subordinate positions or as auxiliaries whose worth was determined by their status in 'traditional' structures. This was especially true in the Middle East where imperial rule, Ottoman or European, was grounded on pre-existing social arrangements and norms. In each instance, the locals' responsibilities were self-limiting. For it was the imperial power that retained all the power of command,

setting the institutional, policy and programmatic frameworks in which the 'natives' operated.

The multifaceted challenge of composing the reawakening of pre-colonial identities with foreign ways is at the crux of post-colonial politics everywhere. Newly independent countries have addressed it by following one of four strategies.

*Self imposed isolation* is the route taken by Myanmar and North Korea. In the former instance, a military dictatorship has sought to preserve its rule by hermetically sealing off the country from all forms of external influence while nurturing indigenous culture. The latter pursued a narrow modernization imperative as dictated by a Maoist version of development with military prowess being the guarantor of its insular autonomy. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan falls into this category even though its isolation was not entirely voluntary. Its overriding objective was to conserve the peculiar Muslim character of Afghan society viewed as embodiment of the pure faith. Insulation from profane influences, including those of less perfected Sunni Islamic societies, was the condition for achieving that ambition.

*Imitation* of the modern West, while aiming to improve on the model, offers a second path. Japan of course provides the outstanding historical example. Singapore is its contemporary successor. Japan was exceptional in having escaped entirely colonial domination. Its other advantages were: a high degree of ethnic, cultural and political cohesion ; and a value system flexible enough to adopt foreign ways on an instrumental basis while be resilient enough to retain distinctive mores. Singapore,

for its part, is a micro state with an unusual demographic mix and strategic geographical location whose example is exceedingly difficult to emulate.

*Nationalism*, carefully cultivated nationalism, has been the strategy of choice in most of the former colonial world. It tries to routinize the collective exultation felt at the moment of independence in liberating oneself from an oppressive and humiliating subjugation by an alien civilization. Nationalism was the engine for mobilizing the populace, legitimizing leaders who embodied it, and fostering social cohesion. Most often, the national myth was a reworking of traditional culture and borrowing the insignia of empires past. The Chinese and Vietnamese Communists variant fused nationalism with a radical ideology of modernization that at once sought to transcend the past and to contest Western political and economic philosophies.

Middle Eastern societies have found none of the three and a half options a comfortable fit. All have been tried, in different places and at different times. Success, political or economic, has been limited where it was not evanescent. The renaissance of Islamic traditions in recent years carries an aspiration that purified, authentic Islamic societies will prove capable of both absorbing and legitimizing selected elements of modernity.

For in the Arab world, the post-colonial project was even more daunting than elsewhere. The historical reference mark was the caliphate, Umayyad and Abbasid, that embraced the entire community of believers – the *ummah*. The political break-up of the early caliphates left behind an intense ideational reality of association with the idea and ideals of a universal community of fellowship united as one before Allah.



The post-independence states had to draw on whatever historical material was available in order to breath life into the states bequeathed them. With the exception of a few places, like Egypt and Morocco, it was relatively thin. Disappointment at expectations unfilled was especially acute for Arab societies since the commonplace frustrations were accentuated by the inability to restore the *ummah*, in either a spiritual/cultural or political sense. The two have been linked insofar as continued political weakness is ascribed to the disunity of the Arab peoples, which in turn stands in the way of Arab civilization's regeneration. The exceptional weight of anguished frustration felt by so many Arabs of all classes, especially in the Middle East heartland of Islam, manifests itself in a limited capacity for self-criticism. The phenomenon is much commented upon. It is as if the long, inexplicable ebb of collective competence and respect leave psyches so sensitive that they cannot bear further, heightened awareness of diminished prowess. Psychologically, it is easier to blame the malignancy of overbearing outsiders. At times, that blame can be directed at local elites seen as having sold Arab pride and interest to those outsiders. Thus, a further opportunity is accorded calculating fundamentalist groups.

Westerners promoting democracy in the Arab Middle East should be sensitive to the subjective reality that any political commodity coming from them will be suspect in most Arabs' eyes. That truth stems from two causes. One is the prickly independence of the post-imperial population – elite and popular alike. The other is the track record of more recent Western countries' involvement in the region's political affairs, an involvement that is widely seen as injurious to Arab and Muslim

interests. The United States and most of Western Europe are viewed as heavily biased in support of Israel while callously overlooking the plight of the Palestinians. That differentiation, favorable to the Europeans, has been blurred due to the EU's joining the United States in supporting unequivocally the Israeli blockade of Gaza and the de facto voiding of Hamas' electoral victory, as well as volunteering in various ways as auxiliaries to the American cause in Iraq. A tinge of perceived religious bias aggravates political objections when the instigation of assaults on Muslims by Christians and Jews is added to the mix, viz Somalia, Lebanon, Gaza and Afghanistan as well as Iraq. In short, a deep seated suspicion exists that the West does not have the best interest of Muslim Arabs at heart. At the very least, those are considerations that should be taken into account in both mode of address and the substance of democracy promotion initiatives.[\[36\]](#)

#### Politics of Former Muslim Colonies in Asia

That experience was shared by the two largely Muslim states that had formed part of colonial India: Pakistan and Bangladesh.[\[37\]](#) Deviations from the democratic standard have occurred in both – repeatedly so. But there never has been an outright rejection of the system bequeathed by the British or the propagation of anti-democratic political ideologies. Where autocratic powers have been taken by military governments or civilian strongmen, authoritarianism has been justified in terms of exigent circumstances and accompanied by an affirmation to restore democratic rule. However delayed, that indeed has occurred – albeit often under popular pressure.

In *Pakistan*, the military takeover led by General Pervez Musharraf in 1999 was the latest in a series of military governments that in the past had seen a reversion to free elections and the restoration of civilian rule.<sup>[38]</sup> The arrogation of exceptional powers, and the emasculation of the legislature, is accompanied by a continuation of local elections, in keeping with what has become established practice. The suppression of political dissent is far from total. The press and other media remain unmuzzled and feisty, although at times intermittently censored. Witness the success of anti-Musharraf Islamist parties in the Northwest Frontier Province and Baluchistan on the Afghan border in the regional elections of fall 2002 at the very time when Musharraf was expanding his extra-constitutional authority at the federal level. This pattern is qualitatively different from the autocratic regimes in the Middle East where political power has been concentrated in dictatorial hands, democratic governance has never occurred, the abuse of human rights is widespread (in some places, systematic), and the commitment to democracy is purely rhetorical or non-existent. Pakistan introduced *Shari'a*, traditional Islamic law, in the early 1990s. The move was punctuated by the declaration of the country as an Islamic republic. That did not stand in the way of the return to civilian rule. Free elections, an accountable government, respect of political pluralism, an open press, and tolerance for religious minorities existed within an avowedly Islamic state. Pakistani politics during this period were dominated by two political parties, bitter rivals for power, neither of which had distinct Muslim identity. Benazir Bhutto's Pakistani People's Party (PPP) alternated in office with Pakistan Muslim League (PML) party led by Nawaz Sharif.

Avowedly Islamist parties garnered less than 10% of the vote in the last open, nationwide elections. The Islamists relative success in 2002 owed much to the Musharraf government's *volte-face* in transforming itself from a patron of the Taliban in Afghanistan to a close ally of the United States in an unpopular war on so-called terrorists in the Tribal Areas and Northwest Frontier province. Islamist opinion was further inflamed by his public promises to rein in the Pakistan backed insurrection against Indian rule in Kashmir. Their fortunes reversed in the national elections of February 2008. The coalition of Islamist parties lost control of the regional government of the Northwest Frontier and were also-rans at the national level. Traditions of a less militant brand of Islam and a politics of accommodation reasserted themselves.<sup>[39]</sup> The Islamists were thrashed at the polls. Radical Islamist groups today do remain a force in Pakistani politics, but more through their acts of violence than by their appeal to the populace.

The resilience of democratic norms recently has been demonstrated in Pakistan where Pervez Musharraf's move toward autocracy, punctuated by the imposition of martial law, was thwarted by a stubborn judiciary, manifestations of popular opposition and Musharraf's own inhibitions about taking actions that could spark a civil war. The brake on Musharraf's ambition was Chief Justice of the Pakistani Supreme Court Iftikar Mohammed Choudry. His implacable resistance to the General's attempts to rule by decree led his ouster. That arbitrary action itself made Choudry the pivot of an aroused opposition led by fellow jurists and the National Lawyer's Guild. Musharraf's loss of credibility obliged him to move ahead with the

scheduled legislative elections that proved his downfall. That bow to democratic norms proved his downfall. His coalition was thumped by the PPP, benefiting from the assassination of Bhutto, and the PML led by Nawaz Sharif who had been exiled for eight years by Musharraf.

Three features of the recent Pakistani drama underscore the crucial importance of an ingrained, inherited liberal political culture: an intractable autonomous judiciary; a vivid 'civil society' composed of professional associations, independent press and party organizations; and a military officer corps restrained by its own convictions from pushing for a true revolution. Further confirmation was provided by the new governing coalition's decision not to oust Musharraf from the Presidency to which he had been elected, albeit in a tainted contest.

*Bangladesh* provides yet another example of a former British dependency, overwhelmingly Muslim, that has managed to maintain its democratic constitution and Bangladesh has experienced periods of authoritarian government as both military and civilian leaders have at times declared states of emergency which involved the suspension of elections and the imposition of martial law. The country went through periods of military rule in the 1970s and 1980s, triggered on two occasions by the assassination of elected prime ministers by maverick officers. Since 1990, threats to constitutional rule have receded. Democratic norms of electoral competition were reinforced. The country has observed three multi-party parliamentary elections

(1991, 1996, and 2001). Domestic and international observers widely recognized them a mostly free and fair.

Two external factors played a role in ending military rule. For one thing, the United States lost its liking for strongmen devoted to keeping under control an unruly politics. For another, international donors pressed for a restoration of free elections as a condition for badly needed economic assistance. The military retreated to their barracks in a period of fierce partisanship marked by corruption and violence. The main protagonists have been the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by Begum Khaleda Zia, the widow of the murdered General Ziaur Rahman, and the Awami League headed by the Sheikh Hasina, herself a daughter of Sheikh Mujib who led Bangladesh to independence. Each of these two women was placed under house arrest on grounds of endemic corruption in January 2007. Each had her political rights restored and returned to partisan combat when the caretaker government cleared the way for fresh elections in February 2008.

The threat of a military coup will continue to hang over whatever civilian government emerges. The Bangladesh military has issued statements touting its "own brand of Democracy" and calling for changes in the constitution to allow military participation in politics.[\[40\]](#) They play on the discontent with the woeful record of the civilian politicians to promote the idea of a unitary, 'clean' working only for the national welfare. This, of course, is the theme of men in uniform everywhere who are seeking political power. In Bangladesh, as in Pakistan, there is no talking of

abandoning wholesale the country's political inheritance. For the most part, the country has become an imperfect working democracy.

Bangladesh has felt the reverberations from the fundamentalism movement sweeping the Islamic world. Bengali *mujahideen*, veterans of Afghanistan, introduced an element of political militancy and religious fundamentalism. That effect has been reinforced by expatriates returning from jobs in the Gulf where they absorbed, to varying degrees, the strictures of Wahabi-ism. In an attempt to wellsprings of discontent and aspiration that feed it, the government introduced elements of *Shari' a* law to govern domestic affairs such as marriage and inheritance. When Prime Minister in 2001, Begum Zia avidly deployed the symbols of an Islamic republic, as in Pakistan. She went as far as to place in the constitution a clause to the effect that the country's rule would conform to "the sovereignty of Allah."[\[41\]](#) For the most part, though, Bangladesh has kept in place civil codes based on English common law. They protect civil liberties and rights of political expression. Despite manifest signs of militant jihadist sects working underground to bring down the government, there have been no draconian restrictions on rights of assembly, speech and privacy. The Bangladeshi political establishment was badly shaken by a wave of orchestrated suicide attacks in August 2005, but it refrained from imposing severe restrictions.[\[42\]](#) Indeed, constitutional reforms by the Caretaker government of 2007 were designed to strengthen the independence of the civil judiciary, which has been weaker than its Pakistani counterpart, as part of a general overhaul of a criminal justice system seen to have been politicized and corrupted. The main imperative was to crackdown on

corruption in all its forms. The Caretaker government sought to "cleanse" politics by taking a criminal justice approach to dealing with the mainstream political parties' chronic habits of self-enrichment. Domestic NGOs, international donors, and national media all gave support to the military-backed interim government.

BNP has formed alliances of convenience with two relatively new Islamist parties, Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh and Islami Oikya Jot. That has gone some way toward giving Islamists a stake in the party system. For its part, the Awami League at first shunned the Islamist movement in preference for an alignment with small leftist and secularist parties. That changed in 2007, when the party invited avowed Islamists to run under its banner. Simultaneously, they formed a tacit electoral alliance with the small Islamist party, the Bangladesh Khelefat. Still, it is noteworthy that there has been no upsurge in support for the latter, despite the country's chronic economic woes, tarnished political establishment, and the movement's extra-parliamentary actions. Moreover, the Caretaker government took a tough stance on radical Islamist elements. Several high profile terrorists were arrested, prosecuted, and even a few death sentences were handed down.

As the December 2008 deadline for the national election approached, the interim administration released most of the high-ranking political leaders imprisoned on corruption charges, tied to an understanding that members of the Caretaker government would not be targeted by a newly elected government. The electoral outcome was a blow to the Islamist political movement and a tribute to Bangladeshi democracy.



Sheikh Hasina Awami League party won an overwhelming victory, gaining 230 of 300 seats in parliament (if only 48% of the raw vote) in a largely peaceful poll. Moreover, it did so in a campaign that contrasted its secular character with the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islama party which was aligned with the rival Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of Begum Kheleda Zia. The Jamaat-e-Islama's tally of seats dropped from 17 to 2. Its uncompromisingly fundamentalist line on issues of social policy and orthodoxy cost it, and the coalition, a significant slice of support among the electorate. The interim government largely delivered on its promise of laying down the conditions for a fair, neutral election that stood in sharp contrast to the country's past experiences. The three most senior ministerial positions in the new government are held by women. Despite recent extra-constitutional developments, Bangladesh's liberal democratic institutions have not been deformed. The country appears back on the track toward a multi-party parliamentary democracy.

Malaysia offers a striking example of the resistance to autocratic tendencies and radical Islam alike. Malaysia has experienced uninterrupted rule by the dominant United Malay National Organization (UMNO) party which has been the political embodiment of Malay nationalism.<sup>[43]</sup> The party followed a pragmatic course in forming ties with the small CHH party that represents the country's substantial, and economically powerful, Chinese community. Under the strong-willed leadership of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed, state powers were used to consolidate its domination – primarily by the soft means of deploying government resources to secure the allegiance of supporters and to punish opponents. However, there are no curbs on opposition political parties, the press is not bridled (although tending to be deferential to the government), and constitutional provisions observed. In the one

notorious deviation from this norm, Mahathir in 2002 jailed UMNO Vice-president and possible rival for power, Anwar Ibrahim, who was convicted on trumped up charges. Ibrahim, a popular leader of the Islamic opposition, had been co-opted by an invitation to join the government. That conformed to Mahathir's strategy of neutralizing potential opposition rather than suppressing it. His readiness to attack Ibrahim also was an indication of the government's confidence in its ability to handle nascent Islamist forces.

Malaysian democracy is strengthened by the emergence of a civil society, including groups promoting women's rights. They are noteworthy in a country where Islamist influence has been steadily growing, inspired by the Iranian example and the wave of Sunni fundamentalism originating in the Middle East. In reaction, Mahathir gave a pronounced Islamist cast to the Malaysian government. That policy has entailed the calculated use of Islamic symbols and rhetoric in identifying Malaysian nationalism with its Islamic roots. More concretely, beginning in the 1980s Sharia law was introduced in a number of the country's constituent states. [44](Mahathir formally established it at the federal level as the basis for adjudicating domestic matters, displacing the civil codes inherited from the British.

Muslims are obliged to follow the decisions of *Shari'a* courts when it comes to matters of Faith and Obligations as a Muslim, i.e. marriage, inheritance and custody others. Other criminal or civil offences come under the authority of secular courts, as in Pakistan and Bangladesh. As a rule, the Civil Courts cannot overrule any decision made by the *Sharia* Courts in their stipulated areas of jurisdiction. This introduction of

*Shari'a* courts has two noteworthy qualifications. The scope of the *Shari'a* courts' authority is circumscribed; they have no authority over political matters or criminal acts beyond the domain of traditional social mores. Moreover, only Muslims are subject to *Sharia* law. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society. Chinese and non-Muslim Indians represent between 35 and 40 percent of the population. Concern for maintaining the domestic peace, which has been disturbed on several occasions since independence by bloody inter-ethnic violence, has induced the government to accord non-Muslims the right to have their domestic affairs overseen by secular courts. Eagerness to keep Malaysia a hospitable place for the heavy foreign investment that has fueled the country's economic boom points in the same direction. Characteristically, as John Esposito has pointed out, Islamic values are "equated with hard work, discipline and progress."[\[45\]](#) The Malaya version of the Islamic revival seems more associated with creating a counterpart to the Confucian ethic than the fundamentalist creed that has taken root to the West.

Malaysian democracy's resilience was shown when Mahatir stepped down in 2003. He passed the baton to Abdullah Ahmad Bawari who succeeded as Prime minister. Bawari continued to cultivate the multi-racial National Front (Barisan Nasional – BS) political coalition as his electoral instrument. He maintained the ONUM's alliance with the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), which represents Hindus, and a small Chinese counterpart. The coalition won a landslide electoral victory in 2004 that increased its parliamentary majority to over 80% of the seats. His administration was marked by perpetuation of the political status quo, sustained

economic growth and signs of growing political discontent both among minorities over the government's aggressive pro-Malay affirmative action programs and Malays of Islamist orientation in the poorer provinces of the country's north.

A stern test – for the government and for Malay democracy – came with the national elections of March 2008. In a shock result, the BN lost five of thirteen governorates (including the industrial center Penang) and its two-thirds majority in Parliament. The opposition coalition was composed of the Chinese based Democratic Action Party (PAS), the People's Justice Party of Anwar Ibrahim (Parti Keadilan Rakyat – PKR), and the Parti Islam se-Malaysia (PIM). It also has the support of disaffected Hindus. The coalition's de facto head was Ibrahim, despite his still being denied his full political rights under the Internal Security Act. Prime Minister Badari reconstituted a diminished government. It was further weakened when a federal court indicted, and then convicted Anwer Ibrahim on charges of sodomy in July which were widely seen as a politically motivated fabrication. Despite his being under a legal cloud, Anwer won a seat in parliament by a wide margin in a by-election held in August. He immediately vowed to directly challenge the ruling government by forging a majority composed of his supporters and dissent elements of the BS. Were he to succeed, Malaysia will experience its first change of power since independence.[\[46\]](#)

Three features of this seismic political event stand out. The results were accepted by the ruling party without protest after a fair and open election. Opposition politicians followed the pragmatic course of putting aside potentially divisive ethnic interests for the sake of electoral success. In doing so, the coalition

mirrored the multi-ethnic politics of the long dominant OMUN. Finally, heightened Islamic sentiment among segments of the Malay community was channeled mainly through a party, the PIM, that was ready to play the game of democratic electoral politics.

Placed in perspective, the post-colonial history of the largely Muslim countries that emerged from the British empire in Asia supports the judgments that: (1) colonial experience is an important factor that offers a partial explanation for the divergence between the autocratic path followed by some former Muslim dependencies and the relative resilience of democratic institutions in others despite severe stresses internal and external; 2) democratic political forms can co-exist with a relatively strong Islamic self-identity, e.g. Malaysia; and 3) public authorities can enforce a policy of respect for adherents to other faiths even while acknowledging, and lending a measure of official recognition to the preponderantly Islamic nature of the society it governs. Witness Hindus in Bangladesh; Chinese, Hindus and Sikhs in Malaysia. Indeed, Bangladesh's national anthem is based on a song composed by a Hindu – Rabindrannath Tagore, the Nobel Prize winning poet and author who is viewed by all Bengalis as the fountainhead of their remarkable twentieth century renaissance.

### The External Environment

War is the enemy of democracy. Security threats, preparation for military action, protracted periods of tension and confrontation – all militate against the establishment or maintenance of democratic institutions. Many of the states that make up the Islamic world have experienced that condition for long periods; some

since they gained independence. In the Arab Middle East, their continual conflict with Israel – punctuated by four major wars, innumerable crises, and the Palestinian *intafadas* – has created circumstances that militate against the development of democracy. Internecine feuds among Arab states, at times erupting into armed conflict as occurred with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, sporadic border skirmishes between Egypt and Libya, the bloody confrontation between Jordan's King Hussein and the PLO, Syria's tangled intervention in Lebanon's civil war, the serial conflicts between Morocco and Mauritania, and of course the three Gulf wars, have contributed to an atmosphere of danger and threat. The martial state concentrates power in the hands of its leader. Security imperatives dictate it. A state of emergency justifies it. Intolerance for opposition and the suppression of dissent are its natural concomitants. This is especially true in political systems where there is little, if any tradition of political pluralism, of open debate on matters of national consequence, of constitutionally protected civil liberties. Where the tradition is authoritarian, if not outright dictatorial, the impulse of leaders is to tighten their control and to enforce deference to both their rule and their policies. The historical experiences of Muslim societies in the Middle East, as we discuss above, did not include the essentials of democracy – even in diluted form. To foster them under the conditions of external conflict is an improbable undertaking.

This was the pattern that the American invasion/occupation of Iraq intended to break by fostering a model democracy with popular consent. Its egregious failure

highlights the impediments to sponsored democratization that are embedded in Islamic Arab societies.

War and threats of war also inflame national and religious passion. The upwelling of pan-Arabism in the 1950s and 1960s, a post-colonial and anti-Western creed that had counterparts in much of the third world, took on a sharper edge in the Middle East. There it drew upon shared language, culture and historical memories of a transcendent Arab community. That sense of collective identity was accentuated by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which served the political ends of leaders like Gamal Abdul Nasser who gave it inspiration and sense of mission. The stress was on solidarity – within Arab states and among them. While Pan-Arabism achieved its goals only intermittently and partially, its message reverberated throughout the region. Mobilization of the populace to a great cause left little space for the niceties of democracy. The dissipation of pan-Arabism, and its replacement by the wave of Islamic fundamentalism, has not changed either the constants of vicarious identification with the Palestinian cause or its calculating exploitation by autocratic leaders to deflect discontents over failed economies or governmental corruption, and to repress challenges to their rule coming from any quarter.

The rise of radical Islamist movements dedicated to the overthrow of regimes nearly everywhere across the Muslim world has had the analogous effect of stifling any moves toward democracy.[\[47\]](#) Pragmatic Arab regimes such as Jordan and Tunisia that had allowed a modicum of political liberalism in respect for human rights have had to contend with serious internal threats. Measures taken to uncover and uproot

militant groups plotting against these governments have led to a lowered tolerance for political criticism generally, a silencing of dissident voices, and the compromise of human rights. The specter of a Taliban-style theocratic tyranny, or the version visualized by the Algerian fundamentalist parties, became so threatening that, initially, liberal elements in these countries supported the crackdown, and the curtailment of political liberties that went along with it. That looked to be the lesser of two evils. The transnational phenomenon of fundamentalist Islam, as an ideational movement and as a tangible force, has resonated within Muslim societies to encourage regression from embryonic democratic forms.[\[48\]](#) This is the diametrical opposite of the transnational forces that have fostered democracy in Turkey. Together, they demonstrate that one cannot make judgments about the correlations between Islam and democracy without taking fully into account factors and forces that originate outside a particular country.

### Turkey

The contextual dimension of Turkish politics, with its distinctly Western orientation which has created a powerful situation logic encouraging democracy, is unique. At the heart of this phenomenon is its Kemalist tradition. The Turkish experience does underscore that Muslim societies are not inimical to the development of a democratic polity.[\[49\]](#) The intersection of internal political developments and external relations is revealing on three counts. First, there has existed a national consensus that Turkey's future lies in association with the democratic, overwhelmingly Christian world of the European Union (and NATO of which it has



been a member since 1961). It does not view that association as being at the expense of ties with Muslim neighbors or the Islamic world generally.

Two, political forces that assert their Muslim identity share broadly in this view of the country's place in the world. Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP – from its Turkish name) whose voter base is Turkey's newly awakened 'silent' Muslims, became the dominant party with its surprise victory in the November 2002 elections. Erdogan's personal popularity combined with disenchantment with the sitting government widely seen as incompetent and corrupt, carried the AKP into power. Its newfound dominance was confirmed by an even more convincing triumph four years later. Also in 2007, Abdullah Gul – Erdogan's chief deputy – was elected President over staunch opposition from Turkey's secular establishment. From the outset, the AKP leadership gave assurances that it would follow through on their stated intention to model itself along the lines of Europe's Christian Democratic parties. Their domestic program matched the commitment to pursuing membership strenuously. Indeed, the government since 2003 has pushed through a far reaching set of economic, constitutional and legal reforms that addressed hard issues sidestepped by previous secular governments.<sup>[50]</sup> Three, all the major trends in Turkey's political life favor the cause of representative democracy and the protection of human rights, i.e. the military's gradual retreat from an overt role in the country's political life, gradual accommodation of the Kurdish demands for acceptance of their rights as a cultural minority, and the Islamic party's acceptance of the secular state (with only minor modifications, e.g. the headscarf) and democratic pluralism.

Turkey's case further illustrates the importance of transnational factors in influencing the domestic forces determining the direction and shape of a country's polity. The consolidation of a constitutional democracy, along with growing respect for human rights, is understandable only with reference to Turkey's foreign relations. Membership in NATO since the 1950s was dictated by geo-strategic considerations: a need for strong allies to protect it against a perceived threat from the Soviet Union. That security calculus engaged Turkey in a multifaceted relationship with a multilateral organization whose character and *raison d'être* went beyond military considerations alone. As the embodiment of the community of Western democracies, NATO encouraged the adherence to democratic values – even if more by example and implicit peer pressure than by concerted policy. Turkey's self-image as a Muslim society under a secular state that was a member of a Western security organization has differentiated it from its Islamic neighbors. Democracy was part of the package. That difference has grown in importance as Turkey set its sights on membership in the EU. The mounting doubts as to the readiness of Union member countries to open the door to their populous Muslim neighbor could have the effect of reviving strains of xenophobic nationalism while intensifying the sense of Islamic identity. Were such a progression to develop, the correct conclusion would be that the role of external influences can be critically important in determining how a Muslim country defines itself; a mistaken conclusion being that there is something about a Muslim country that is inimical to its integration into a modern, secular community of nations.

## V. ISLAMIC SCRIPTURE AND DEMOCRACY

Any assessment of Islamic societies' compatibility with democracy must take account of variations in the region's history, traditions, and current political and cultural environment. While the Islamic world does exhibit recognizable traits visible in every country where Islam is the prevailing religion, its polities do not permit facile generalizations as to religion's shaping influence on political life. Islam's influence, however, is strikingly noticeable. The religion's pertinence to political life is pronounced but indirect. More than a set of religious beliefs and practices, Islam serves as "a religious constitution for society that provides rules for the conduct of life, but no 'blueprint for the organization of politics,'" as Ernest Gellner has put it.[\[51\]](#) In the Muslim tradition, it is incumbent on the holders of state power to maintain a civil order in conformity with the tenets of the faith, upholding the Sacred Law. The gravest threat to the *ummah* is *fitna*, discord and disorder. Social peace and the virtuous life of a Muslim believer are intertwined. It is difficult to envisage one without the other.

As to the particular basis on which political authority is constituted, and how it conducts the affairs of state on matters that are not prescribed by the *Shari'a* and the *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet) from which the *Shari'a* draws, are silent. (There exist differing versions of the *Hadith* as well which vary in length and interpretation). In addition, *Shari'a* is a loose term that covers the four great schools of jurisprudence: *Hannafi*, *Malaki*, *Shafi* and *Hannabi* along with their local variants. Each derives from a different treatise or treatises which have not been composed into a coherent,

definitive corpus of law. The Ottomans did produce a loose amalgam that served as a broad legal framework for guiding the empire's affairs. Matters of family law crucial to local communities remained to be adjudicated according to the traditional schools. Noah Feldman has made an erudite case for the proposition that an Ottoman style homogenous *Shari'a* can be the foundation stone for a stable political order rooted in Islamic principles.<sup>[52]</sup> Eliding the peculiarities and advantages of an imperial state, he envisages an operationalized *Shari'a* as the most promising basis for reconciling a law-based political system with a Muslim tinted public consciousness. Paradoxically, post Ottoman Turkey has taken a quite different route. An antithetical view is offered by those who see Islam's innate 'egalitarianism' as militating against anything like an Ottoman model insofar as only an authoritarian system can impose a single, unitary body of law and jurisprudence.<sup>[53]</sup> For an open system based on consensus and compromise, with the avenues to power constantly reopened, i.e. democracy, brings to the fore competing notions of what the law says and how literally it should be followed. Another prominent participant in this debate, Tariq Ramadan, stresses the radical individualism of prophetic Islam. If, as he says, "Every individual is invited to address God directly," the authority and implicit mediation of *ulema* and *qadis* claiming to have superior insight into the Prophet's message(s) is threatened.<sup>[54]</sup> From this vantage-point, non-traditional practices of all sorts challenge the established order- whether they take the form of Western secular democracy or 'bin-Ladenism' whose creed transfers "Islam from the hands of the jurisprudence scholars....to those of the simple ordinary Muslim."<sup>[55]</sup> Of course, a simple ordinary

Muslim is inclined to take guidance from a charismatic populist. Thus, the Islam version of the classic association of democracy with tyranny.

The orthodox establishment has behaved no differently than its Christian or Hindu counterparts when confronted with 'protestant' style deviation from the ecclesiastic norm. To postulate a direct link between the individual and the Divine is to circumvent religious authority. Too, it opens the way to heresies of interpretation and ritual. Indeed, Islam has experienced that kind of challenge. At the forefront were the greatest minds of the *ummah* when Islam was at its zenith. Miskawayh and Avicenna (*ibn-Sina*) in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and Averroes (*ibn-Rushd*) in the 12<sup>th</sup>, were apostles and exemplars of rational philosophical discourse.[\[56\]](#) Their rationalism went beyond metaphysics to include experimental science and practical improvements in the physical conditions of Muslims, especially in the realm of medicine and healing. They and their followers exercised powerful influences that extended across the Islamic world. The former two, Persians, and the latter, an Andalusian, came from that world's geographical limits.

They shared a central understanding of the relationship between reason and religion, rationality and faith, that transcended their particular orientations and, at times, contentious disagreements.[\[57\]](#) One was the belief that the intellect was an essential instrument for understanding God's Universe and the material realm he created. Myth and ritual were for the untutored common people. But individuals possessed of critical intellect had no need to refer to the transcendental to deepen knowledge of the natural order or the behavioral virtues imposed by Scripture. For

such a person, Averroes affirmed, reason is a support and criterion of faith.[\[58\]](#)

Second, the man of intellect and higher virtue was obliged to observe an ethic of personal and social responsibility – even if that observance brought him into conflict with secular and/or religious authority (as was indeed the case for Avicenna and Averroes). They explicitly argued that the capacity of the human mind to use reason as an aide to determining what a righteous person should do, in ethical terms, before Allah and as a member of the Muslim community. Third, the Word of Allah as expressed in the Koran was not sufficient to guide human conduct. It needed to be interpreted and applied to a range of contexts and circumstances. Understanding the human condition does not rely on the transcendental alone, the revealed is true in its essence – guidelines for conducting life are revealed through analytical thinking. Together, these premises staked out the intellectual ground for a humanism of Islam thought and Islamic practice. That humanist tradition was once widespread and vibrant. It faded but never was extinguished.

In more recent times, it has given sustenance and justification to the modern school(s) of ‘new thinkers.’ Their view of Islam as a system of belief emphasizes its adaptiveness in the light of shifting social circumstance and growing knowledge of the natural world. One leading figure, Fazlur Rahman from Pakistan, has offered this interpretation: “I assert that the Koran is entirely the Word of God to the extent that it is infallible and totally free of any untruth, but to the extent that it has come into the heart of the Prophet and then onto his tongue, it is entirely his (the Prophet’s word....”[\[59\]](#) To paraphrase: Allah ‘spoke’ to Mohammed in his heart; He did not

dictate the words to Mohammed that the Prophet consciously wrote in the Scripture as did Moses in receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. That being the case, interpretation and application are essential - not just acceptable.[\[60\]](#) The approach to Scripture of these 'new thinkers' has evoked a fierce counter attack from the orthodox, radical fundamentalist or conservative. However, the truth remains that Islam has known a rationalist reformation whose philosophical lineage continues into the present. That rationalism has not been associated, though, with a critical analysis of public life and institutions. (Interestingly, Aristotle's *Politics* was the one Aristotelian writings unavailable to Averroes).

Koranic texts do refer to sovereignty, in the abstract. As Muqtedar Khan has explained, "the Quranic concept of sovereignty is universal....transcendental...and truly absolute" because it derives from the Divine. "God the sovereign is the primary law-giver, while the Islamic state and the Khalifa ...are God's agents on earth."[\[61\]](#) "There is no juridical space outside the presence of Allah" (*haqqan illa billah*) according to the Sunna tradition. The exercise of sovereign power, though, is necessarily human. The Koran has little to say on this score. The Western Christian idea of Divine Monarchy has no Islamic counterpart. The Eastern Orthodox concept of the Emperor-Patriarch is even further removed from Islamic thought.[\[62\]](#) Comparison with the institution of Caliph is misleading insofar as the latter has no spiritual identity *per se* but rather is "protector of the faithful." How God's agents are chosen, how rulers structure the instruments of government, and how they treat their subjects remain open questions. As a practical matter the rule of humans is not opposed to

the rule of God – a notion propagated by many Islamic fundamentalists, the *salafists*, to demonize their opponents. They are complementary, inescapably so. Indeed, as Chouet explains, “this interpretation is contrary to Islam itself, for two reasons: either...the *ijtihād* (effort at comprehension and interpretation through exegesis) is closed since the definition of the four great schools at the end of the IXth century, and therefore all innovation is illicit and blameworthy (*bid’a*)...or, it is open, and the *salafist* interpretation has no more validity than that of others, including the modernists.”[\[63\]](#)

How Divine Authority and earthly governance may be reconciled is a question that has eluded Islamic thinkers, explicitly so on the relatively few occasions that it is explicitly posed. There is no equivalent to the relatively crisp Christian distinction between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Man; no counsel from the Prophet “to render unto Caesar those things that are Caesar’s, and to render unto God those that are God’s;” no clear line drawn between the Sacred and the Profane. Hence, it is fruitless to seek a blanket answer to the question of Islam and democracy by resort to Koranic texts and Sacred Law. Not only does the Muslim world today embrace a diversity of governmental systems, but we also find hybrid systems that do not lend themselves to easy categorization. This has always been true. We know from the observations of Ibn Battuta that, in many places, the character of ruling elites reflected customs and practices quite different from what they were in the Middle East heartland.[\[64\]](#) Heirs to the Mongol conquerors in the three kingdoms they established through Southwestern and Central Asia – the Khanates of Chagatai,



Kipchak and the Ilkhans - were anything but exemplary Muslims in their personal conduct. The same was true of Sultanates in South India and Sumatra whose mores betrayed their Hindu or Buddhist past. The Sahel of sub-Saharan Africa provides further examples.

One must make clear that any comparison between the influence of Islam and Christianity on the forms of political life is hazardous. The achievement of democracy in the West stems from the profound evolutionary changes in Christian civilization that sharply diminished the strength of orthodox, established religion. In practice, the forces struggling for liberal, constitutional democracy normally had to deal with the Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church and most Protestant denominations as obstructions if not outright enemies. One is hard pressed to think of a single Christian church of significance that allied with liberal democrats during the critical periods of that struggle.[\[65\]](#) One properly might still raise the question as to whether there were features of Christianity that were more conducive than the broad transformation we place under the heading of 'modernity' than the singular features of Islam. It is not my intention to try to answer that question. I do incline toward the view that such a judgment is unsustainable.[\[66\]](#)

The one notable difference, which underlies the assessment made in this section, is that a fully formed model and concept of liberal democracy has intruded itself into political discourse across the Middle East at a time when Islam is still a vibrant force. Time frames are critical, for understanding accommodations in the near term and longer term prospects.

Democracy itself is multiform, as we have discussed. One needs to separate its different components and then use each as a benchmark against which to gauge a given country's approximation to it. Again, those components include: the legitimization of rulers through open, competitive elections; the representation of the populace through those elected officials; legal limits on the on the holders of governmental office in their exercise of state power; and the protection of individual human rights against abuse by the wielders of power.

Islamic religious texts, as we have noted, are mute about the legitimizing basis for political authority – other than affirming that God is the ultimate lawgiver. Scripture and commentaries expound upon the precepts that should guide the behavior of the virtuous individual as an observant member of the *ummah* or community of believers. They do not stipulate a specific set of virtues for a ruler: yet, they do enjoin the ruler to act as custodian of the citizens' welfare – a responsibility for which he will be held accountable by Allah. The Hadith quotes the Prophet as saying: Anyone whom Allah has placed in charge of a citizenry but who does not take care of them sincerely will not even get a scent of Paradise."[\[67\]](#)

A radical interpretation of this discrepancy can point to a theocratic state wherein authority is lodged in a body of religious scholars, *ulama*, to ensure righteousness is observed in the promulgation and execution of the rules that organize collective life. Iran since Khomeini's revolution is the closest embodiment of a kind of Islamic republic "with a special bias toward the authority of scholars"[\[68\]](#)

embodied in the Council of Guardians. Iranian Shi'ism is noteworthy for the existence of an organized religious hierarchy that does not have a counterpart in Sunni societies.

The *mullahs'* Council of Guardians - endowed with ultimate unappealable authority – coexists with a popularly elected government which performs the more mundane affairs of state within the bounds set by, and supervised by the Council. Domination of the *Majlis* (legislature) by reformers under the leadership of President Khatami has resulted in an unstable situation wherein the representative dimension of the state lives in a constant state of tension with the Council which righteously acts to subordinate it. The *mullahs* were the victors. Strains between Amedi-nejad, of a different order, are not yet conclusively resolved. Some sort of dynamic balance of powers is operating with an unpredictable outcome. It is noteworthy that in 'theocratic' Iran there is an acknowledgement that societies, i.e. the community of Muslim individuals, have the right to chose via the ballot who governs them on a broad range of public matters. This is so even while the *mullahs* brook no challenge to the principle that they alone are the ultimate source of legitimization.[\[69\]](#)

It is an oddity of history that the most complete Islamic theocracy was the Sunni Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Draconian in its methods for regulating every facet of social life and individual conduct, Taliban rule was justified by a literal, fundamentalist reading of scripture. Its leadership was self-anointed under the personal moral authority of Mullah Omar. Legitimacy was at once charismatic and divine insofar as Omar and his acolytes claimed authority as the virtuous ones who were most

obedient to scripture. Such a regime made no provision for popular representation, the free expression of opinion or civil liberties.

Taliban rule, like that of the *mullahs* in Iran, was based upon a radical interpretation of Koranic scripture and Islamic tradition. Both, as noted, are open to more liberal interpretations. Indeed, there is basis for concluding that the life of the Prophet himself provides justification for the idea of a constitutional compact between ruler and citizens. Liberals point to the compact of Medina (*Dustur al-Madina*, or Constitution of Medina) between Mohammed, acting in his capacity as the political ruler of Medina simultaneous with his ministry of the growing Muslim *ummah*. Mohammed did not justify his earthly rule on divine revelation alone. Rather he consulted with citizens of Medina, non-Muslim and Muslim alike, to seek their consent for his exercise of state authority.<sup>[70]</sup> The principles of the newly revealed faith were its foundation; however, its legitimization and forms were specific to place and circumstances. The compact of Medina can be broadly interpreted as setting precedent, and justification for constitutional democracy within a devout Islamic community. Indeed, it was a pluralistic, tolerant state in its early days. The paucity of subsequent examples modeled on Medina, though, tempers so radical a determination. The Medina precedent is not deeply etched in Islamic political thought or practice. However, it does offer sound scriptural grounds for a liberal interpretation of the proper relationship between state and Islam while challenging the fundamentalists' claims that some kind of theocracy is the natural, and only true Muslim polity. For one thing, it is grounded on the egalitarian principle central to

Islamic thought. For another, the only other legitimizing principle- implicit in Islamic texts – is the Divine, which is nowhere associated directly with any specific form of rule. The one explicit admonition is that a worthy ruler must uphold the *shari'a* and defend the faith against enemies. The great gap between apolitical ideal and tawdry reality creates an opening for the religious populist who joins egalitarianism to a rekindled Koranic literalism. In earlier epochs, various forms of ecstatic religious experience provided emotional outlets for believers unmoved by stale ritual and seeking communion with others while searching for Divine inspiration. The prominent role of Sufi movements, practices and beliefs in Islamic history exemplifies this truth. That tradition has withered.

In recent decades, Sunni fundamentalists have filled the gap with the idealized vision of a purified *ummah*. Within this mythical space occupied an intense community of believers offers meaning and promises alleviation of confused alienation instead of emotional liberation or the individualized pursuit of happiness which is the lure of secularism. The fundamentalists' appeal leans on a restoration of ritual. That may well be its Achilles' heel insofar as (a) the most vital and intelligent persons may find it stifling once the initial burst of idealism is spent (e.g. Iran), and (b) its hold on minds and spirits requires keeping the modern world at bay – literally.

Moreover, Islam preaches that the faithful are all equal in their relation to God. It follows that in principle “every Muslim who is capable and qualified to give an opinion on matters of Islamic law, is entitled that law of God when such interpretations become necessary” according to the Islamic scholar Abu'l A'la

Mawdudi.<sup>[71]</sup> He concludes, “In this sense the Islamic polity is a democracy.” Disputation, though, is contrary to the sacred principle of *Tawheed* (Unity of God). It has been associated historically with the institution of the *Khilafa*, seen as God’s vice regency on earth. The conservative interpretation of the concept stresses the concentration of authority in the *Khilaf* to apply the law of God as a descendent of the prophet. But the Islamic world has not had a universally recognized *Khilaf* since the collapse of the Abbasid dynasty in Baghdad was violently overthrown by the Mongols under Helegu in 1258. The Ottoman Sultan’s claim to the title never gained universal acceptance. Hence, more liberal interpretations argue the proposition that political authority now resides in the community of the faithful, and not in authoritarian leaders whose claim to power are purely temporal.

The Islamic concept of *shura* (broadly translated as consultation) provides a further basis for rejecting the assertion of an intrinsic incompatibility between Islam and democracy.<sup>[72]</sup> While the concept has been interpreted in widely divergent ways, it does stand for some form of consultative decision-making process – at all levels of Islamic society. There is a Koranic admonition as to consultation: “those whose affairs are decided by mutual consultation....shall have his reward from Allah.”<sup>[73]</sup> *Shura* by any interpretation is not identical with the principle of ‘consent of the governed,’ though. The latter is a product of the European Enlightenment. The governed has come to be defined as a host of individuals, each applying its own reasoning faculties. Participants in the *shura* process, by contrast, do so as members

of an encompassing community that is the predominant social reality. Moreover, they normally act through communities organized on a kinship or sectarian basis.

Disputes among Islamic scholars revolve around a number of contentious issues: is *shura* obligatory or merely desirable - Koranic quotations can be found to support either position?; is the consensus reached through *shura* binding on the holders of some public position or advisory?; is consensus in fact the objective or rather a venting of diverse viewpoints?; can, even should, it be set aside when rulers are faced with vexing problems and hard choices that threaten the well-being of the *ummah*?

The last is an interpretation that sits well with all the autocratic rules of the Muslim world who have routinely painted stark images of enemies while painting tantalizing visions of spiritual and material deliverance as reason to act arbitrarily. Still, in Islamic tradition there are explicit references to the obligation of a ruler to govern justly, especially in *Hadith*. Consider these 'Sayings of Mohammed;' "Anyone whom God placed in charge of a citizenry but who does not take care of them sincerely will not even get a scent of Paradise; God forbids Paradise to any ruler of a Muslim citizenry who dies while he is deceiving them; We do not assign authority to one who asks for it, or to one who covets it."<sup>[74]</sup> The last admonition conveys a suspicion of political ambition, a warning against aspirants to power who are self-seekers who may relish its exercise. What we do not find is citation of any antidote to the abuse of rulership or a justification for rebellion. Indeed, the *Hadith* quotes the Prophet thusly, "Rulers will be constituted over you whom you will both recognize and despise. One who disapproves if innocent, and one who ignores is safe; but not one who gladly follows

along. People asked, 'Shall we fight them, Messenger of God?' He said, 'Not as long as they keep up prayer among you.' [75] One can almost hear the audible sigh of relief from the myriad autocrats over the centuries upon discovering this passage. The recent boom in state sponsored mosque construction by leaders never renowned for their piety is in this spirit.

It is true that one can find in the *Hadith* sayings that point in the opposite direction from a stoic passivity among the misgoverned faithful. There is this: "The Prophet was asked, "What is the most blessed struggle? He said, speaking truth to an oppressive ruler." [76] This admonition admittedly has not reverberated loudly in Islamic political tradition. Moreover, it commonly is interpreted as conveyed to a close counselor or vizier rather than to a wider circle of engaged citizens. That said, it could be viewed as justifying subjecting rulers to critical review of their actions in a democratic mode.

The concept of *ijma* is complementary to that of *shura*. *Ijma* in Islamic tradition is associated as well with the conception of *assabiya* understood as corporate society. Literally 'consensus' in Arab, *ijma* refers to the unity of sentiment and thinking within the community of believers, the *ummah*. Sunni Muslims regard *ijma* as the third fundamental source of *Sharia* law, after the divine revelation of the Qur'an, the prophetic practice or *Sunnah*. (The analogical reasoning or *qiyas* is described as fourth source in Sunni Islam, whereas Shi'a Islam uses '*aql*', intellect). Its underlying premise is the statement attributed to Mohammed in the *Hadith* that "my community will never agree upon an error." The extrapolated inference is that



customary practice, as confirmed and validated by the *ulema*, embodies religiously grounded, applied truth. In this sense, such truth is 'acquired' rather than produced through deliberation. Post-prophetic Islamic history offers little if anything in the way of examples of an identifiable process. Normally, *ijma* has referred to the doctrine and judgment of established religious authority, i.e. the *ulema*. Traditionalists stress this interpretation. By contrast, liberals claim that truly democratic consensus should involve the entire community rather than a small and conservative clerical class, especially since there is no formal religious hierarchy in Islam. Affirming the democratic character of the *ummah*, the latter postulate that consensus among the populace is the ultimate, *ijma*, is the ultimate source of standards as to correct behavior. Of course, that raises the age-old question of how consensus is to be reached given the impossibility of holding society wide assemblies. Collective sentiment is as elusive as collective will. Liberal constitutional democracy is not suited to fostering a common view that approximates *ijma*. It is much better suited to encouraging compromise and tolerance for diverse viewpoints. There is the rub.

Finally, it is unclear what operational meaning *shura* has in the age of the nation-state. Representative democracy acting through free elections presupposes differences of interest and outlook. Conservatives argue that the unity of the community should take precedence over the assertion of particularisms. Islamic law (*Shari'a*), Islamic traditions (*tariq*), and the authority of the learned lawgivers (*ulama*) taken together are the essential ingredients of a devout, harmonious community of the faithful. Society so visualized downplays the individual – and, implicitly, individual

rights. That is why Muslim conservatives so strongly reject the Universal Declaration of Human Rights written into the United Nations Charter. It is threatening in two ways: first by placing the individual above the community; and second by calling for an equality of gender roles through its Articles on women's rights. The latter is seen not only as striking at cultural tradition but also as undercutting the kinship networks that remain the building blocks of most Muslim societies.<sup>[77]</sup> The reflex among conservatives is to denounce pressures from without as at once misconceived in alien terms, and attacking the very things that bond and strengthen Islamic societies.

Conservatives do not go unchallenged, though. Whatever the influence of waxing fundamentalist ideas and the *salafist* movement, there is a competing liberal interpretation of *shura*, and what it implies for the organization of political power in Islamic societies. The modernists argue that one can remain a believer in the scriptures yet reject rigid, literal readings of the *Shari'a* that confuse what is divinely inspired with what has been determined by specific historical conditions. That assertion takes inspiration from the powerful arguments laid down by Avicenna and Averroes nearly a millennium ago. If imagining the Islamic past sends pangs of sorrow through the heart of a believer, its brilliant moments of enlightenment can provide model and motivation as well.

The outcome is unknowable, of course. What can be said with some measure of confidence is that social transformation in the direction of more rights and privileges for citizens cannot occur in contradistinction to Islamic culture, much less in contention with it. Rationalism, in all its forms – including a constitution that serves

as contract between rulers and ruled, needs to emerge from within Islam however stimulated elements from without. The first reform thinkers of the early twentieth century recognized this. It was they who coined the term *salaf*, or 'pious ancestors,' whose revival was deemed necessary accompaniment to the modernism Islam could not and should not evade.

## CONCLUSION

The outcome of these debates, along with the political contests they reflect, will not be decided conclusively. Each Muslim country will find its own path, or be doomed to an endless quest for one, influenced by a concatenation of factors - internal and external. The contextual elements encompass certain religious trends apparent across the Islamic world. But these countries are not insulated from other strong currents in a globalizing world: economic interdependencies with attendant developmental imperatives, the appeal of some liberal ideas (women's rights; respect for human rights; and – to a degree - diverse life-style choices) which attract segments of Muslim societies including some of the more conservative. The impressions they make are reinforced by the immediate experience of more open societies either through emigration of family members or virtually via telecommunications. This is an encounter of historic dimensions: not only between Islam and the values of Western enlightenment, a chaste Islam and the culture of materialism, but at the same time the encounter of Islam with its own past and own destiny.

It is imperative to keep in mind that Islam is not monolithic, as religion or culture. The most cursory experience of the contemporary Middle East dispels the

illusion that its societies are counterparts to European ones in the Age of Faith. By diverse routes, reformist and enlightenment ideas have entered the cultural bloodstream. The graded variations of belief, of practice and of modes of life are striking. So are the numerous amalgams.

One cannot undervalue the appeal of wealthy, bountiful and even 'liberated' modern societies. Only studied insularity can prevent them from exercising some measure of appeal to the Arab world. For they promise things that humans have craved since time immemorial: material well-being and security, personal safety from violence and the abuse of public power. There also is the lure of individual self-expression. Most people prefer to have their say rather than be kept mute. Having the opportunity to do so beyond the confines of the clan is tantalizing for the obvious reason that any individual today *lives* in that wider world, actually or virtually. True, for most the freedom to sound off is less compelling than the freedom to get out from under the lash or freedom from want. Still, it is real. Governments that clear channels for self-expression take some political risk. Blocking those channels, though, adds to the ferment of discontent.

Fear of modern society's several attractions working its seeming magic is what motivated the Taliban to impose an insularity that amounted to a sort of societal solitary confinement. It motivates other radically fundamentalist groups of similar mindset. A more generalized apprehension exists among the authoritarian leaders of Muslim countries that the West's democratic creed inevitably will undercut the legitimacy and credibility of their rule. For secularism is not identical with democracy.

Secularism and autocracy can readily be reconciled. The Ba'ath regimes of Iraq and Syria are testimony to a truth entrenched in modern European history. Indeed, they self-consciously emulated European antecedents. In the Middle East, the opponent of democracy does not always come clothed in Islamic garments. Moreover, there are elements of Islam as religion and civilizational culture that are compatible with democracy, as discussed above. The absence of *Arab* models that compose the essentials of the virtuous Islamic life (personal and collective) with material comfort and some measure of individual liberty, as Malaysia and Turkey are managing to do, plays into the hands of the fundamentalists – and, indeed, Islamic conservatives generally. For those non-Arab countries are not widely viewed as offering a generally applicable model. So it is the Western model of democracy that predominates in the minds of Middle Easterners, with the United States the most riveting exemplar of modernity. Consequently, how Western countries conduct themselves – especially their actions in the Greater Middle East - counts profoundly. It counts as much as what the West does in promoting democratic ideas and practices. It is a grave error for both Westerners and Muslims to see democracy and democracy promotion as inexorably linked. An observation by Dostoevsky about well meaning paternalism is pertinent:

“The question of the {Islamic peoples} and our view of them...is the most important question on which our future rests. But the [Muslims] are still a theory for us and they still appear to us as a riddle. We, their patrons, regard them as part of a theory, and it seems that not one of us loves them as they really are but as we imagine them to be. And should the {Islamic peoples} turn out not as we imagined them, then we...would at once renounce them without regret”[78]

## NOTES

[1] Illustrative quotations compiled by John B. Judis in “The Chosen Nation: The Influence of Religion on U.S. Foreign Policy,” Policy Brief 37 March 2005 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

[2] Thomas Paine 1778, 1782, 1776. Quoted in Michael Scheuer Marching Toward Hell: America And Islam After Iraq (New York: Free Press, 2008) pg.99. Scheuer also quotes Thomas Jefferson, “Paine thought more than he read.”

[3] The term ‘civic millennialism’ was coined by Nathan O. Hatch The Sacred Cause Of Liberty (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

[4] President George W. Bush Inaugural Address January 29, 2005.

[5] This latter conception is associated with John Quincy Adams who rejected high-minded interventions, “going abroad to slay monsters;” instead, he urged the United States “to commend the general cause by the countenance of her voice and the benignant sympathy of her example....She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.” John Quincy Adams Address of July 4, 1821.

[6] This unquestioned self-image contrasts with a more complicated historical record. Until Wilsonianism sprung to life as a full-fledged doctrine, American leaders were not shy in speaking about US national interests opposed to somebody else’s (e.g. Mexico). The complete identity of the national interest with what was good for the world as a whole became a convenient justification for a more assertive role on the world stage. This truth is largely forgotten in the United States, but not in the rest of the world.

[7] President George W. Bush West Point Commencement Address June 1, 2002.

[8] Jacob Weisberg The Bush Tragedy (New York: Random House, 2008)

[9] Hubert Védrine, Discours a la Conference d’IFRI June 26, 2000.

[10] Timothy Garton Ash captured the symbols and signs of this asymmetry in his reportage of President Bush’s post-reelection European sojourn in “The agony and the Extase,” *The Guardian* February 24, 2005.

[11] Shakespeare Henry V noted by Scheuer *op cit*, pg. 207.

[12] Statement released by The White House June 9, 2004

[13] President George W. Bush Inaugural Address, January 24, 2005. The President’s theme was foreshadowed in two public speeches: an address to the National Endowment for Democracy the preceding November, remarks of the President, November 6, 2003; and to a European audience in an address at the Banqueting House, London, November 19, 2003.

[14] Public opinion across Europe was wary of an American led campaign to spread democracy. An AP-Ipsos poll showed 84% of the French, 78% of the Germans, two-thirds of the British and the majorities in Spain and Italy saying they did not think the United States should be exporting democracy. The contrast with American opinion was less stark than the rhetoric of the Bush administration and its supporters would have suggested. By a margin of

53 – 45 percent, Americans expressed opposition to having the country play the role of global exporter of democracy. A reasonable inference is that opinion everywhere was skewed by the experience in Iraq. In the United States, the historical belief in an American role in the vanguard of a spreading democratic movement probably was muted by the association with the trials and tribulations in Iraq.

[15] Bush 2005 *op. cit.*

[16] Guillaume Parmentier, "Europe and the Bush Doctrine," *Financial Times*, March 10, 2005.

[17] Dana H. Allin and Steven Simon, "America's Predicament," *Survival* Vol. 46 No. 4 (Winter 2004-05).

[18] A perceptive ten year retrospective assessment of the Barcelona process if given by Jean-Francois Daguzan, "Why Sarkozy's Mediterranean plan looks worth a try" *Europe's World* Autumn 2007

[19] "EU leaders agree to weakened Mediterranean Union plan" *euobserver* 14.03.2008; "Brussels to keep control of 'Mediterranean Union'" *euobserver* 21.5.08.

[20] France too, of course, have a sense of national mission dating from the Declaration of the Rights of Man. It is regularly proclaimed in the public declarations of its leaders. Chronic Franco-American frictions have something to do with the incompatibility of two countries both of whom see themselves as prophets of a universal message. The difference is that (1) some of the world, some of the time gives indications of seeing a measure of truth in the American version; and (2) the majority of American political elites and the populace actually believe it. The love-hate relationship between the two countries is analyzed in Michael Brenner and Guillaume Parmentier, Reconcilable Differences: French-American Relations In A New Era (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2002). China, America's future rival for global supremacy, offers another example of a country with a deep sense of its exceptionality and superiority going back millennia. The Chinese expect recognition and deference to that superiority; but they do not assume or seek emulation.

[21] It is striking that even leading European newspapers report news from Iraq only episodically with little attempt at analysis. Their American counterparts, who have failed to provide much of the latter themselves, at the very least make daily reference to events – however superficial the account.

[22] There is some reason to believe that the divergence in Euro-American attitudes may be narrowing, at least insofar as public opinion is concerned. The sobering experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan have instilled cautionary instincts among many Americans. An in-depth survey by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations yields revealing results. To quote from their report: "A majority rejects the idea of using military force to promote democracy....Americans are not convinced that when there are more democracies the world is a safer place....In contrast, large majorities favor putting diplomatic pressure on governments to respect human rights....A large majority favors the US promoting democracy through diplomatic and cooperative methods....A large majority prefers working through the United Nations to promote democracy." Americans On Promoting Democracy September 2005. Yet, a willful Bush administration has had little trouble maintaining its interventionist course. The outlook for its successor is of greater moderation along with sustained faith in America as an active force for democracy in the Middle East

[23] Cooper *op. cit.* pg. 47.

[24] Reflection on democracy promotion has refocused analytical attention on the ingredients of democracy as well as on conditions conducive to its taking root. A thoughtful consideration of the complications encountered in the fostering of democracy by outside parties is provided by Thomas Carothers *Critical Mission. Essays on Democracy Promotion* (Washington, D.C.:

Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 2004). Carothers and his colleagues at the Endowment have published a number of valuable studies, *inter alia* The New Middle East by Marina Ottaway, Nathan J. Brown, Amr Hamzawy, Karim Sadjadpour, and Paul Salem (2008); Islamist Movements and The Democratic Process In The Arab World Carnegie Paper No. 67 March, 2006; “Democratic Mirage in the Middle East” by Marina Ottaway, Thomas Carothers, Amy Hawthorne, Daniel Bramberg Policy Brief No. 20 October 2002. The Bush administration’s failures have cooled the ardor for active democracy promotion in the United States, somewhat. In the ‘never say never’ category, the outstanding work is Tamara Gorfman Wittes Freedom’s Unsteady March: America’s role in Building Arab Democracy (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2008). More restrained optimism informs James Traub’s The Freedom Agenda: Why America Must Spread Democracy (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008).

[25] The Arab Reform Initiative, a multinational consortium of institutes, is the prime source of empirical and analytical work on current conditions and developments. See, for example, “The Role of the West in Internal Political Developments of the Arab Region” by Osama Al-Ghazdi Harb May, 2007. A broad global perspective on the democratic wave is provided by John Markoff Waves of Democracy: Social Movements and Political Change. (Newbury Park, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1966). Also valuable are the contributions to: Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Noble, eds., Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World. V. 1: Theoretical Perspectives. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner; see especially contributions by Lisa Andersen and Michael C. Hudson.

[26] Khaldun’s classic work, which was enormously influential in shaping Muslim thinking about the social order, is *The Muqaddimah: An Interpretation of History* Trans. N. J. Dawood and Franz Rosenthal (Princeton University Press, 1989); also, the excellent summary edition by Charles Issawi *An Arab Philosophy of History/ Selections from the Prolegomena of Ibn Khaldun of Tunis (1332-1406)* New York: Murray, 1950.

[27] *Muqaddimah* Vol 1 pp. 340-420.

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] Bush administration policy-makers have gone to the extreme of fecklessness in ignoring the contradictions intrinsic to imposed democracy. Even the absurd phrase “coercive democracy’ was bandied about the White House according to Scott McClellan What Happened (New York: Public Affairs, 2008) pg. 172.

[30] Paul Schroeder. “The Risks Of Victory” *The National Interest* No 66 Winter 2001/2002.

[31] This conception of man, society and mechanics was the subject of rigorous critique by Lewis Mumford in his classic works: Technics and Civilization (New York, 1934); and The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Development (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1956). His interpretation of applied rationality’s place in the development of modern civilizations still stands out for its cogency, erudition and perspicacity.

[32] British diplomat-scholar Michael Axworthy offers a consistently authoritative and cogent interpretation of Iran’s political legacy in *A History of Iran: Empire of the Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

[33] See the definitive work of Nikki R. Keddie Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

[34] An incisive appraisal of the skewed understandings that underpinned the ‘war on terror’ is provided by Francois Burgat Islamism in the Shadow of al-Qaeda (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008 translation from the French original).



[35] A penetrating assessment of the place held by kin-based solidarities in the governing structures of North Africa, and how the French manipulated them, see the pioneering work of Mounira Charrad States and Women's Rights: The Making of Post-Colonial Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

[36] I discuss these issues in: Michael Brenner, Toward A More Independent Europe EGMONT PAPER (Brussels: Royal Institute of International Relations, 2007), and "Interests & Values: The Middle East" in Changing Identities – Evolving Values: Is There Still A Transatlantic Community ed. Esther Brimmer (Washington, D.C.: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2006).

[37] For a wide-ranging consideration of how British post-colonial Muslim countries have fared, see Asian Islam in the Twenty-first Century eds. John Esposito, John Voll and Osman Barak ((Oxford University Press, 2009).

[38] This cyclical pattern in Pakistani politics figures prominently in studies of post independence politics. See: Zahis Hussain Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle With Militant Islam (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Stephen P. Cohen The Idea of Pakistan (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2006); Harrin Haqqari Pakistan Between Mosque and Military (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2005); Kukreja, Veena. Contemporary Pakistan: Political Processes, Conflicts, and Crises. (Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage, 2002); S.V.R. Nasr "Islamic Opposition in the Political Process: Lessons from Pakistan" in Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism, or Reform? Ed. John L. Esposito (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1997).

[39] It is instructive to remind ourselves that during the long years of the Indian independence movement, the Pushtuns of the Northwest Frontier Province stayed non-violent for the most part. Their inspiration leader, Khan Abdullah Ghaffar Khan, was an ally of Gandhi.

[40] Statement by General Moeen U. Ahmed quoted in "Bangladesh to have own brand of democracy" *The Daily Star* April 4, 2008.

[41] Riaz *op. cit.* chapter 4

[42] The sources of Islamist movements is examined by Ali Riaz Islamist Militancy In Bangladesh: A Complex Web (Routledge, 2007).

[43] For a broad discussion of post-independence Malaysia see Loh, Francis Kok-Wah and Boo Teik Khoo Democracy in Malaysia: Discourses and Practices. (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2002). Also, C. Baxter Bangladesh: From Nationalism To A State (Boulder, Co.: Westview, 1997).

[44] See the analysis of the Islamic factor in Malaysian politics in Esposito and Voll *op cit* chapter 6

[45] Esposito and Voll, *op. cit.* pg. 137.

[46] See Thomas Fuller "Ex-Prisoner's Candidacy Tests Malaysia's Rulers" *The New York Times* August 26, 2008.

[47] For an excellent, exceptionally informed recounting and analysis of the rise of fundamentalist Islam, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, see Alain Chouet "Patterns of political violence in the Muslim world" Lecture at the Transregional Institute – University of Princeton April 2003. It is available at Chouet's website: <http://alain.chouet.free.fr>. Two companion pieces, in French, may also be found there: "Violence Islamique: quelles acteurs? Quelles menaces? Quelles reponses?" Brussels March 2006 and « L'association des Frères Musulmans, chronique d'une barbarie annoncée » July 2006. Chouet is former Chef du Service de renseignement de sécurité de la DGSE (Directoire-General de Securite External). DGSE is roughly France's equivalent of the CIA combined with the FBI's counter intelligence section. Also noteworthy are the works of Olivier Roy: The Failure of Political Islam (Harvard University Press, 1998), and Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah (Columbia University Press,

2006). Normally, one would be expected to cite the writings of Bernard Lewis, the doyen of American scholars of Islam and the Middle East. His political activism since 2001 as advisor on, and unstinting supporter of the United States' policies in the Middle East (including public donor to 'Scooter' Libby's legal defense fund) raises serious question as to the disinterestedness of his recent scholarly work.

[48] See, too, Sayari, Sabr Sayari and Yilmaz R. Esmer Political Parties, and Elections in Turkey. (Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner, 2002).

[49] For well informed considerations of the Turkish phenomenon, see: Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, Ioannis N. Upsurge amidst Political Uncertainty Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (German Institute for International and Security Affairs); Gareth Jenkins February 2001. Context and Circumstance: The Turkish Military and Politics International Institute of Strategic Studies Adelphi Paper 337 February 2001; Daniel Brumberg "Islam is Not the Solution (or the Problem)" *The Washington Quarterly* Winter 2006; Soner Cagapty Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 2006).

[50] The AKP/Erdogan phenomenon and its roots is examined in: E. Fuat Keyman "Modernism, Secularism and Islam: The Case of Turkey" *Theory, Culture & Society* 2007; 24; 215 and Serif Mardin "Turkey's Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture and Reconstruction" *Turkish Studies* Vol 6, no 2 June 2005.

[51] Ernest Gellner Conditions Of Liberty Civil Society and Its Rivals (London: The Penguin Press, 1994) pg. 26.

[52] Noah Feldman (NYU – Law) The Rise and Fall of The Islamic State (Princeton University Press, 2007).

[53] For example, Abdullahi Ahmed an-Na'im Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari'a (Harvard University Press, 2008).

[54] Tariq Ramadam In The Footsteps of The Prophet: Lessons From The Life of Mohammad (Oxford University Press, 2007) pp. ix-x.

[55] Madawi al-Rashid "Islam Today From the Jurisprudence Scholars to the Men of the Cave" *Al-QudsAl-Arabi* (online version) February 6, 2006

[56] Their principal texts include the following.

AVICENNA: *Al-Qanun fi'l-tibb* (The Canon of Medecine)), ed. I. a-Qashsh, Cairo, 1987. *Risalah fi sirr al-qadar* (*Essay on the Secret of Destiny*), trans. G. Hourani in Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). *Danishnama-i 'ala'i* (The Book of Scientific Knowledge), ed. and trans. P. Morewedge, The Metaphysics of Avicenna, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973). *Kitab al-Shifa'* (The Book of Healing). Critical editions of the Arabic text have been published in Cairo, 1952-83. See also Lenn Evans Goodman Islamic Humanism (Oxford University Press, 2002).

MISKAWAYH: *Taharat al-a'raq* (Purity of Dispositions), also known as *Tahdhib al-akhlaq* (Cultivation of Morals); Ibn Miskawayh *Tahdhib al-akhlaq* (*Cultivation of Morals*), ed. C. Zurayk, Beirut: American University of Beirut Centennial Publications, 1966; C. Zurayk, editor and translator, *The Refinement of Character* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1968).

Arkoun, M. (1961-2) 'Deux épîtres de Miskawayh' (Two Treatises of Miskawayh), *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* (Institut Français de Damas) 17: 7-74. ; Arkoun, M. (1970) Contribution à l'Étude de l'humanisme arabe au IVe/Xe siècle: Miskawayh, philosophe et historien (320/325-421) = (932/936-1030), Contribution to the Study of Arab Humanism in the 4th/10th Century:

Miskawayh, Philosopher and Historian), (Paris: Vrin; revised 2nd edn, 1982); Kraemer, J. 'Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: a Preliminary Study', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104 (1): 135-64.

AVERROES: Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory (Islamic Translation Series) edited and translated by Charles E. Butterworth (Brigham Young University Press, 2002); On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy (Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007 Vol 21) ed. George F. Hourani; An excellent critical overview is provided by Ibrahim Najjar Faith and Reason in Islam, An Exposition of Religious Arguments (Oxford: Oneworld Publ, 2002). Also, Averroes, Translated by Ralph Lerner (2005). Averroes On Plato's Republic. Cornell University Press, 2005); Kogan, Barry S. Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation. (SUNY Press, 1995); Leaman, Olivier. Averroes and his philosophy. (Routledge, 1997); Baffioni, Carmela Averroes and the Aristotelian Heritage (Milano: Guida Editori 1996).

[57] There are features here that could have been precursors of the early Enlightenment. Averroes in particular bears a kindred resemblance to Spinoza. Both exalted intellectual cognition as the unique human instrument for understanding God, nature and man. They rejected anthropomorphic conceptions of God, denied that He either intervened to affect the individual's conduct or experienced the actions of individuals. Yet, they believed that man had the ability to recognize virtue and to achieve it by living in conformity with a universal standard of love and justice. Oddly, Spinoza was utterly ignorant of Islam, ascribing to it the worst features of the Catholic Church.

[58] Averroes Decisive Treatise op. cit.

[59] Fazlur Rahman Islam (University of Chicago Press, 1966) pg. See, too, his Islam and Modernity (Chicago University Press) and A Study of Islamic Fundamentalism (Oxford: Oneworld Press, 1999).

[60] This view is shared by the Egyptian, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd "The Quran: Man and God in Communication", Leiden Conference 1996. Rahman and Abu Zayd are members of the loosely defined modernist school of Islamic thought. Excerpts from their work accompanied by an exceptionally insightful commentary are available in Rachid Benzine ed. Les Nouveaux penseurs de l'islam (Paris: Albin Michel, 2004).

[61] "Quoted in United States Institute of Peace. "Islam and Democracy" Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Special Report, September 2002.

[62] A comparison of Islamic and Christian understandings of the connections between Divine sovereignty and rulers is provided by Ibn Khaldun. See Isawa chapter 7.

[63] Chouet, L'Association des Freres," op. cit. The original, full French is: « *La haqqan illa billah* » (« Il n'y a pas d'espace juridique hors la personne de Dieu ») dit la tradition (Sunna) du prophète Mahomet. Cependant, comme Dieu ne se manifeste que rarement et de façon assez elliptique, on est bien obligé de s'en remettre à ses interprètes auto-proclamés sur Terre. Il fut une époque où, selon la coutume musulmane, l'avis de ces interprètes (*mujtahid*) devait être validé par le consensus (*ijma*) de leurs pairs ou des Croyants. Mais les Frères Musulmans se sont arrogés depuis une cinquantaine d'années, parfois par la séduction ou l'argent, le plus souvent par la coercition, le « terrorisme intellectuel .... Cette démarche est d'autant plus opportune que le monopole interprétatif des Frères est contraire à l'Islam lui-même. Car, de deux choses l'une : ou bien, comme le pensent nombre de théologiens et juristes musulmans, l'*ijtihad* (effort de compréhension et d'interprétation exégétique des sources de l'Islam) est clos depuis la définition des quatre grandes écoles jurisprudentielles sunnites à la

fin du IX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, ou bien il est toujours ouvert. Si l'*ijtihad* est fermé, l'interprétation des *Salafistes*, qui ne s'inscrit dans aucun des quatre rites - pas même le rigoriste hanbalisme -, est illicite et constitue une innovation blâmable (*bid'a*). S'il est ouvert, l'interprétation salafiste n'a pas plus de valeur que les autres, notamment les plus modernistes, et ne saurait s'arroger un monopole.

[64] Ibn Battuta The Rihla (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1995) volume 4. A superb explication and contextual assessment of Battuta's travels and ports of call is given by Ross E. Dunn The Adventure of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim Traveler of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century (University of California Press, 2005) chapter 8, 10, 11.

[65] It can be argued that the non-conformist churches in Britain played a part, indirect if not direct, in expansion of the franchise during the nineteenth century. The United States does not figure in this assessment since the country was 'born' secular..

[66] I am indebted to Professor Sven Biscop at the College of Europe in Brugges for calling my attention to these issues.

[67] The Wisdom of the Prophet. Selections from the Haddith ed. Thomas Cleary (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2001) pg. 75.

[68] Gellner, op. cit. pg. 28.

[69] The interplay between the Iranian revolution's Shiite dynamic and Sunni fundamentalism is examined in Vali Nasr The Shia Revival: How Conflicts With Islam Will Shape the Future (New York: Norton, 2006). The contours of the broad Islamic revival on politics in the Muslim world is examined in Martin I. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., Fundamentalism and the State: Remaking Politics, Economics, and Militance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[70] Consider the contrast with the admonition of the prophet Isaiih: "Take counsel together and it shall come to nought." *Isaiih* 11:7.

[71] Abu'l A'la Mawdudi "Political Theory of Islam," in Khurshid Ahmad, ed., Islam: Its Meaning and Message (London: Islamic Council of Islam, 1976).

[72] An authoritative assessment of political thought in the Islamic world is offered by Esposito and Voll, op. cit. chapter one "Islam and Democracy: Heritage and Global Context".

[73] The *Holy Qur'an* 42:8. Trans. Amatul Rahman Omar and Abdul Mannan Omar (Noor Foundation International, 2005).

[74] The Wisdom of the Prophet. Selections from the Haddith ed. Thomas Cleary (Boston: Shambhala publications, 2001) pg. 75.

[75] *Ibid* pg. 111,

[76] *Ibid* pg. 112.

[77] Some thoughtful conservatives challenge the Western idea of individual freedom by making the argument that a person 'liberated' from the constraints of communal social units could become a threat to a 'liberal' social order rather than its building block. The isolated individual in an atomized society can experience pangs of isolation so severe that s/he is moved to commit acts of anomic violence. In short, Western style individualism could produce the very *jihadis* and suicide bombers whom democracy promotion schemes aim to prevent from emerging. One worldly conservative quoted Janis Joplin to me to this effect: "freedom is just another word for having nothing left to lose" – so strap on the suicide belt.

[78] In the original, of course, Dostoevsky was referring to 'serf.' Dostoevskii, Ponoe, sobranie sochinenii. Vol 22 pg. 44