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Security and Peace in the Middle East

Experiments with Democracy in an Islamic World

David G. Curdy
Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

Air War College
Maxwell Paper No.4

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Please send inquiries or comments to:
Editor
The Maxwell Papers
Air War College
Bldg 1401
Maxwell AFB, AL 36112-6427
Tel: (334) 953-7074
Fax: (334) 953-4028
Internet: lagrinter@max1.au.af.mil

AIR WAR COLLEGE
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Foreword

In this excellent essay Lt Col David G. Curdy examines the prospects for democratic transitions in the Middle East. He notes that with the conclusion of the cold war, the basis for US Middle East policy, which had centered around oil, Israel, and the Soviet Union, should be reexamined and, perhaps, redesigned. Moreover, major political events stemming from the 1990–91 Gulf War have reenergized efforts to implement democratic processes within the region.

Colonel Curdy argues that the West has generally held the view that democracy and Islam are mutually exclusive and incompatible. However, he notes that the Islam-based traditions of consultation, consensus, and independent judgment are being used today to legitimize the rise of democracy in a number of Arab states. In opposition to this democratizing trend is the rise of Islamic radicalism which rejects evolutionary political change and liberal political formulas. The clash of these two approaches will severely test US policy in the Middle East. Contemporaneous with these political currents is a new phase in resolving the decades-old Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The Palestinians' struggle to create a democratic identity will be key in establishing their economic vitality and in reassuring Israelis that a Palestinian state will not be a security threat.

Colonel Curdy concludes that the future challenge for the US will be to foster the view among Arab states that the US favors democratization based on Islamic traditions, rather than the imposition of Western democratic institutions on our Muslim friends. When democratic Arab nations can coexist with Israel, the US will have contributed to a basis for regional peace and stability that it has long sought, both as an ideal in itself and as instrumental to America's continuing access to Middle East oil and markets.

D. BRUCE SMITH
Major General, USAF
Commandant
Air War College

About the Author

Lt Col David G. Curdy has been interested in the Middle East since his undergraduate days while studying political science at Washington State University during the early 1970s. During his military career, Colonel Curdy has traveled to the Middle East on several different occasions visiting with both military commanders and political officials in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Turkey, Egypt, and Israel. He has served with various fighter units in USAFE, PACAF, and CONUS and was a squadron commander at RAF Lakenheath, United Kingdom, in 1993–94. Colonel Curdy is a graduate of the Armed Forces Staff College at Norfolk, Virginia, and he is a graduate of the Air War College, class of 1995.

Security and Peace in the Middle East

Experiments with Democracy in an Islamic World

Since the end of World War II, the United States' (US) national interests in the Middle East have been diverse and at times in conflict. US interests in the Middle East have been described as vital by every US president since Truman. At various times the US has supported nondemocratic regimes in the Middle East, usually based on one of three reasons: (1) ensuring Israel's national survival, (2) blocking the Soviet Union from establishing hegemony within the region, or (3) guaranteeing the uninterrupted flow of oil to American and Western industry and consumers. "These three concerns—oil, Israel, and the Soviet Union—were the driving forces behind American Middle East policy throughout most of the period from the 1950s through the 1980s. Democratization was viewed, at best, as a secondary objective."[1]

US national interests will continue to be intertwined amongst competing intraregional conflicts that arise within the Middle East. But, as a new world order emerges from the cold war, the old rubric for US Middle East policy has to be reexamined and, perhaps, redesigned.

Two major developments have evolved in the aftermath of the very short, but strategically important, 1990–91 Gulf War. They are (1) agitation for, and development of, democratic political processes in a region historically governed by Islamic tribal monarchies and military despots and (2) a concerted international and regional effort to solve the Palestinian-Israeli problem. With the threat of the Soviet Union gone and the major military threats to Israel largely mitigated, the number one priority for the US is in securing long-term access to Middle East oil. US ability to promote peace and stability in the region will determine whether we are successful in the long run.

In my opinion, the recent upsurge of democratization within Muslim nations will offer opportunities for the US to align itself politically with presently and formerly autocratic

Arab states. However, the short-term implications for US policy-making could be painful and will definitely be challenging. A definition of a democratic nation, for our purposes, is one that has a legitimate and accepted constitution (written or unwritten) and an elected, or otherwise representative, government in which individuals in power can be dismissed and replaced without violence or anarchy. Samuel Huntington has noted that such transitions must occur at least twice before a democratic nation can truly be regarded as "consolidated."[2]

After considering the question of whether Islam and democracy are compatible, this paper will examine the beginnings of democratic processes within Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, and Israel/Palestine. I will show that the religion of Islam does not necessarily eliminate the possibility of government based on democratic processes. I will highlight some Islamic interpretations of the Qur'an and how democracy relates to Islamic life vis-à-vis politics. As an example, both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are attempting to facilitate a consultative process, based on Islam's *sharia*, or religious law, to allow their citizenry a form of participation in the governing process. In concluding the brief looks at respective cases, I will address some viewpoints on how the continuing attempt to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict may hinge on whether a Palestinian government can be established based on democratic principles, a government whose very existence would not pose a threat to Israel. Finally, the essay will conclude with observations on the future for US policy and insights which seem to apply across the individual country cases.

Islam's Perspective on Democracy

How does Islam view democracy and what does Islam say in regard to governing its people? Three concepts play a central role in Islam's outlook towards democracy: consultation (*shura*), consensus (*ijima*) and, independent judgment *(ijtihad)*. These terms have not always been associated with democratic institutions; but they are, according to advocates today, critical concepts in discussing the prospects of Islamic democracy.[3]

Consultation has been broadly redefined today upon the principle of the ruler consulting with citizens. Traditionally, consultation has been a one-way relationship in which the ruler asks subordinates for advice. Advocates today argue that the Qur'an calls for "mutual advice" through mutual discussions on an equal basis. Today's modern authors also relate consultation to the rights of the people. "The people, being the vicegerents (*deputies*) of Allah, have a general right to dispose of their affairs on the basis of the principle of consultation," and this right should include "the formation of an assembly whose members are representatives of the people."[4] Today, these ideas exist in some form and are practiced in Kuwait, with its National Assembly, and in Saudi Arabia, with its Consultative Councils.

Consensus in traditional Islam has for centuries been the ultimate validation of decisions, especially in the Sunni sect which encompasses 85 to 90 percent of Muslims worldwide.* Final religious authority rested with the *ulama* (the scholars) who used consensus to determine Islamic law. The general public had no say in this process, and, when the scholars reached a consensus, debate generally ended. Consensus is an evolutionary concept which many of today's writers see as an expanding political idea. They believe that consensus can be a method for accepting majority rule in the Islamic world. One author notes that "the legitimacy of the state . . . depends on the extent to which state organization and power reflect the will of the *ummah* (the Muslim community)." Some authors also point out that the legitimacy of state institutions is not derived from written sources, but is based on the principle of *ijima.* In sum, they argue that consensus can both legitimize Islamic democracy and offer a procedure to carry it out.[5]

* This paper has not attempted to deal with the case of revolutionary Iran, a non-Arab, Shiite state. While the Iranian revolution was, in its early days, an inspiration to Islamic activists throughout the Middle East, Iran's luster has dimmed in recent years as its economy has collapsed and the mullahs have increasingly repressed internal dissent. It remains to be seen whether Iran continues to be viewed as an alternative form of Islamic democracy or whether the mostly Sunnite world of Islam ultimately will judge it both as a failure and as an irrelevant Shiite experiment.

Some Muslim scholars believe that by exercising informed, "independent judgment," they will be executing God's will. Muhammad Iqbal (1875–1938), one of the major leaders in modern Islam in the 1930s, called for "the transfer of power of Ijtihad from individual representatives of schools (elites) to a Muslim legislative assembly (citizens)."[6] Muhammad Iqbal believed that democracy was the most important political ideal within Islam. Although critical of European colonialism, he highly respected English democracy and praised England for embracing this "Muslim quality."[7]

Even in this short exploration of some of Islam's basic concepts, it appears that many modern Islamic writers are developing Islam's traditional concepts of consultation, consensus, and independent judgment into a framework capable of acting as a foundation for Islamic democracy. These writers see Muslims actively engaged in redefining democracy as complementary to a resurgence of Islam. Democracy and Islam are contradictory only if democracy is defined by certain Western standards. As the US had its Jefferson and Hamilton to help define the New World's brand of democracy, perhaps the Islamic world will produce its own founding fathers of democracy.

Saudi Arabia: A Kingdom Attempts to Reform

The Arab approach to government has never taken the road of pluralism. Rather, Arabs and the Islamic religious culture have taken paths such that politics is a "winner take all" process.[8] The tribe and family are more important in Islamic culture than the rights and privileges of the individual. The trend within the Arab community has focused on gaining and keeping power under the singular rule of a family or tribe. An obvious example is the al-Saud family ruling the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The current period of family rule began when Abd al-Aziz, a member of the deposed al-Saud family, expelled the Rashidi family and recaptured the city of Riyadh in 1902. King Abd al-Aziz, also known as ibn Saud, further consolidated his family power, albeit with internal and external help, to

establish the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. The kingdom has been under Al-Saud rule ever since.[9]

The 1990–91 Gulf War focused US political debate on whether American lives were sacrificed merely to sustain the uninterrupted flow of Middle East oil and whether our democratic values of liberty, justice, and civil rights were replaced by a more pragmatic view of the world in that case. The US realization that we had prevented one dictator from absorbing Kuwait, and then restored an undemocratic regime in its place, created pressure on Washington to push for democratic change in Kuwait. The challenge for US policymakers was, as they increased emphasis on further democratization within Arab states, that they might be creating further instability in the region, thus allowing radical Muslims "waiting in the wings" to finally gain the reins of power.[10] The nightmare scenario for the West is, once the radicals are democratically elected, that they will dispense with the democratic process and its ideals and install a radical Islamic theocracy like the one we see in Iran today.

The Gulf War has energized both a Westernized element and a conservative religious element within the Saudi Arabian citizenry, causing the al-Saud family to create a Consultative Council system, both at the national and provincial levels. This system is intended to broaden popular participation within Saudi national decision making. In 1932, King Abd al-Aziz expanded his unelected Consultative Council, *Majlis ash-Shura*, which he had established earlier in the Hijaz (western Saudi Arabia) while he was consolidating his kingdom. This council system continued into the 1950s; however, it slowly lapsed and disappeared as its original members died. Discussions to revive the council began in the 1960s. They began again in 1980 when King Khalid charged a commission of eight prominent Saudis to address this issue. The commission recommended that the Consultative Council be reinstated, but opposition within the royal family shelved the recommendation until 1992.

Probably sensing US and domestic pressure after the Gulf War, King Fahd reestablished the Consultative Council on 1 March 1992. During his announcement, King Fahd issued a set of royal decrees that guaranteed some first

ever individual rights. These rights included protection against unwarranted searches and protection of private property. On 20 August 1993, King Fahd named the 60 members of the national Consultative Council, and it was inaugurated on 29 December 1993.[11] He also formed a mid-level system of Consultative Councils for the kingdom's 13 provinces. These provincial councils are primarily concerned with such economic issues as local infrastructure projects and services. Many Saudis feel the provincial councils will have a more immediate impact than the national council. They believe that direct citizen input on local domestic projects will have a more tangible effect on the daily lives of the citizenry.

The national Consultative Council exists to advise the government on foreign policy, economic development, international agreements, and rules and regulations. It is empowered to summon ministers for questioning, review the annual reports of ministries, and comment on government proposals. The national Consultative Council does not significantly diminish the king's authority, much less give the people an ability to change the government peacefully.[12]

So what effect will an unelected group of advisors have on the king's decisions? King Fahd has stated that he will be responsive to the council's advice and requests for change. It is anticipated that both the national and provincial councils will work cordially with the royal family initially to establish an organizational precedent and legitimacy.[13]

Consultative Council members are not likely to challenge either the king's or the royal family's authority for fear of being disbanded. It is believed that the councils, in time, may become emboldened and challenge the royal family on issues of national importance. Today, current councils fall significantly short of being a congress or a parliament in the Western sense, and the average Saudi citizen has no chance of turning to the opposition and changing his government through a peaceful democratic process. However, it appears that the Saudi population believes that the reinstated Consultative Council system is a first step in the gradual democratization of the country. Consultative Council members want the council to establish

its legitimacy and to evolve into a more powerful representative institution.[14]

US and Saudi officials are generally pleased that no Islamic radicals are presently seated within the council. The Saudi government believes the overall benefits of excluding the radical Islamists exceed the potential hazards stemming from their exclusion. The radicals are incensed by their exclusion, and assert that their lack of representation will lead only to further confrontation with the government.[15] Political exclusion from the democratic process surely is not what one thinks of when a nation is pursuing a democratic system of government. Excluding the radical Islamists from participating *may not* turn out to be the most productive course of action for dealing with this problem in the long term. But the al-Sauds have been remarkably resilient and agile in walking the line between tradition and reform. Perhaps their Consultative Councils will buy time for additional political development.

Kuwait: A Progressive Approach

Kuwait differs from Saudi Arabia markedly in that it is a cosmopolitan city-state that has been comparatively receptive to Westerners and their culture. After World War I, Kuwait came under British protection and continued so until June 1961. In comparison, no foreign country ever controlled the Saudi Arabian interior. The al-Saud family gained and maintained control of the peninsula through tribal alliances and religious zeal. The al-Sabah family, which rules Kuwait today, came to power centuries ago through a commercial community decision-making process among the state's large trading families.[16]

Today the main pillar of Kuwait's democratic institutions is the National Assembly. This partly elected assembly enacted a constitution that came into being on 16 November 1962. The National Assembly and the amir share a balance of powers within the framework of the Kuwaiti constitution. Both can initiate laws and any assembly member can introduce a bill. The amir has veto power, but the assembly can overturn a veto by a two-thirds majority. However, the amir can dissolve the assembly, although new elections

must be held within two months. Also, a provision (unique among all six Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC] states) exists which allows any 10 assembly members to initiate a motion to withdraw confidence in a cabinet member. A confidence vote is then taken that requires a majority vote in the assembly to pass. This proviso allowing the assembly to remove a cabinet official is truly a remarkable benchmark in the region's democratic growth. Kuwait's National Assembly has greater legislative power than that vested in any other Gulf Cooperation Council representative institution.

One serious limitation within this democratic process is the disenfranchisement of a large portion of the electorate. Only 6 percent of Kuwait's citizenry, 82,000 out of 620,000 citizens and about 800,000 noncitizens, are able to vote. Strictly speaking, only adult males of families who resided in Kuwait before 1920 and who have maintained residence through 1959 can vote. Women, like their counterparts elsewhere in the region, cannot vote. The likelihood of expanding the electorate by enfranchising women is slight in the foreseeable future. Despite that state of affairs, women are currently part of the political process and were actively engaged in 1992 assembly campaigns as advisors, speech writers, and organizers.[17]

The Gulf War severely weakened the al-Sabah family politically, and Washington subsequently had leverage in seeking to expand the democratic process in Kuwait. The US gained concessions and elections took place on 5 October 1992. Formation of official political parties was forbidden. However, the government unofficially approved the formation of opposition groups which acted as de facto political parties. These groups represented the full spectrum of political ideology to include the fundamentalist Muslim Brethren, the harder-line Islamic Salafi group, and the liberal-nationalist Kuwaiti Democratic Forum.[18]

In an effort to bury the "winner take all" attitude characteristic of past Kuwaiti and Arab politics, opposing liberal and Islamic groups acted more maturely and were rewarded for their efforts. The October 1992 election was not to the government's liking as 31 of the 50 seats on the ballot were won by the opposition. Rather than declare the election invalid, the prime minister selected six elected

members to represent the various viewpoints of this newly elected assembly. The prime minister selected across the political spectrum, including liberals, fundamentalists, and Shiites, to form a coalition cabinet.[19] Contrary to the situation in Saudi Arabia, 19 of the 31 newly elected opposition assembly members were considered to be fundamentalist Muslims. Interestingly, these fundamentalists are not considered to be radically antigovernment.

The assembly quickly took action to address critical issues within Kuwait during its 1992–93 session. It tackled issues over the government's objections, including reviewing and approving both the civil and military budgets. It also investigated government fiscal irregularities, particularly the $5 billion in losses that occurred in the Kuwaiti investment office in Spain. Consequently, the assembly stiffened penalties for abuse of public funds. It also investigated the dismal military response to the Iraqi invasion, human rights policies within the state, and the amir's decrees since the last dissolution of the assembly in 1986.[20]

The assembly pursued a course that is intended to make the al-Sabah family accountable for its actions. As a result, assembly criticism of the Kuwaiti military and its lack of reform led to the resignation of the armed forces chief of staff in February 1993. The assembly voted down a proposal in January 1994 to exempt ministers from being brought to trial. It is evident that the National Assembly in Kuwait is taking a more aggressive approach in its affairs than the Saudi Consultative Councils due to its constitutional basis and its relatively longer established precedent for sharing the country's power. However, both the Saudi and Kuwaiti rulers have made it clear they are not forfeiting power, only enlisting these bodies to help them govern.

Jordan: "Top Down" Democratization

Jordan's King Hussein has thus far been successful in co-opting Islamic activists into participation in government, much as they have been co-opted in Kuwait, thus isolating the radical Islamist fringe. In the case of Jordan, however, most of the impetus and leadership have come from the king in the form of "top down guidance" rather

than from outside pressures or from the bottom up as in Kuwait.

King Hussein rules a population that is 60 percent Palestinian.[21] As a result, the external and domestic security of King Hussein's monarchy is intimately intertwined with his position vis-à-vis the Palestinians on the West Bank and in Jordan. Prior to the Gulf War, in June of 1988, Yasir Arafat attempted to convince the Arab League that he, as leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), should have full financial control over the Palestinians in the occupied territories. In a far more politically threatening maneuver, Arafat also attempted to gain Arab support as the sole legal representative of all Palestinians in the region. He was successful in the former but did not gain Arab support for the latter. However, the Palestine National Council did grant him recognition in the latter case.[22]

To counter this move by the PLO leader, King Hussein formally ended his relations with, and responsibilities for, the West Bank on 31 July 1988. As part of this action, the king dissolved the Jordanian parliament, whose membership included 50 percent representation for the West Bank. His actions caused pressure on the PLO to act as a state-in-exile and to act accordingly in the international diplomatic arena. The PLO met this challenge by proclaiming the independence of Palestine, which King Hussein formally recognized.

The king's severing of claims to the West Bank allowed him to withdraw from regional issues and focus on the domestic problems confronting Jordan. He announced in the spring of 1989 that a new National Assembly would be chosen democratically from citizens residing on the East Bank of the Jordan. These elections were held in November and were the first held since the 1967 war with Israel. The membership of this new National Assembly contained approximately 40 percent Islamic fundamentalists. Their campaign slogan of "Islam is the solution" was designed to revive Islamic law in Jordan. Interestingly, this Islamic bloc within the National Assembly most often acted pragmatically rather than ideologically and usually supported the king's policies. The Islamists' restraint, when they disagreed with the king's policies, as in the case of his disengagement

from the West Bank, was a significant factor supporting a revival of democratic processes within Jordan.

Further commitment by the king was evident when he announced in November 1989 his intention to appoint a royal commission to draft a national charter to regulate Jordan's political process. This new charter would legalize political parties, which had been banned since 1957. The charter was ratified and implemented in June 1991.

Historically, political opposition in Jordan usually manifested itself by questioning the legitimacy of the monarchy. The new national charter, which allowed for the full spectrum of political views, also required these political parties to state their allegiance to the monarchy. The result was diffusion of the opposition towards the monarchy and expansion of political participation by the Jordanian citizenry.[23]

Then came the Gulf War and very quickly Jordan became an international outcast. The Saudi government, which had been a strong friend and ally of King Hussein, took a hard line against Amman during the war. Riyadh suspended its oil supply to Jordan and expelled 20 Jordanian diplomats as a result of the king's pro-Iraq position. However, domestically, the king's status with his people had never been higher. The Jordanian populace strongly supported his policy toward Iraq, and the king's program of democratization within Jordan enhanced his overall legitimacy as the country's monarch.

After the war, Jordan's image improved rapidly with the US and the West. By the time Madrid peace talks began in October 1991, the US had released $57 million in economic and military aid to Jordan.[24] At the Madrid conference, Jordan's leadership allowed PLO-approved representatives of the Jordanian delegation to negotiate directly for the first time with Israeli representatives. The conference eventually led to the historic signing of a declaration of principles between Israel and the PLO in Washington, D.C., on 13 September 1993.

This Israeli-PLO rapprochement allowed Jordan to pursue its own bilateral agenda with Israel. Since the 1967 Six-Day War, Jordan's relations with Israel had been modestly favorable compared to other Arab states and the PLO. King Hussein's continued support for democratization

within Jordan was validated once more when new parliamentary elections were held in November 1993. Almost a year later, a peace treaty between Israel and Jordan was signed on 26 October. King Hussein has committed Jordan's economic future to links with Israel and the West, and this new commitment on Jordan's part must deliver tangible economic returns in the short term. If the economic benefits are slow in materializing, King Hussein most likely will find the opposition becoming more active. However, opposition parties, mainly the Islamists, are giving the government some time to show economic results from the Israeli peace process.

The government does not see a direct threat from its opponents; however, it is taking precautions. These precautions range from prohibiting Islamic activists from preaching in mosques to denying them access to private and state funds. These government actions have resulted in cries of "anti-democratic practices," but the regime has been careful not to carry its crackdown to extremes.[25] The opposition confronting King Hussein has been vigorous but not violent. The government has been heavy handed at times but not totally undemocratic. The king's response to President Assad of Syria, who described leasing back Jordanian territory to Israel as blasphemy, was: "With all due respect, the terms of the treaty are not your business." To Yasir Arafat and his street demonstrators who had publically insulted the king for signing the treaty, which they viewed as adverse to Palestinians' rights in Jerusalem, the king sent the following message: "You cannot go it alone and try to upstage me; ingratitude towards Jordan's long partnership with the hapless Palestinians and denial of the Hashemites' role in the guardianship of the holy sites in Jerusalem will not help your cause either with the Israelis or the international community; coordinate with Jordan and recognise at least a symbolic role for the Hashemites in Jerusalem, or else do not count on my help for whatever you try to achieve."[26]

King Hussein, unlike other Arab leaders in the region, has never felt comfortable resorting to repressive methods of governing. His commitment to liberalizing the democratic processes within Jordan and co-opting the Islamic opposition has been a counterbalance to his signing of the

peace treaty with Israel. He is betting that the long-term economic benefits will far exceed and offset any political and/or religious backlash from aligning Jordan with the traditional Arab enemy, Israel. King Hussein has craftily orchestrated a system of rights and responsibilities for the opposition to adhere to. He demands loyalty to the monarchy and rational behavior. In return he offers political access and the means to change Jordanian society.

The Palestinians and Israel: Palestinian Democracy

It appears that a new Palestinian state is evolving out of the seemingly endless confrontation between the Arabs and Israelis. The form of its government is only just emerging. Yasir Arafat is still at the helm of the PLO and is the de facto head of the Palestinian homeland in the territories of Gaza and Israeli-evacuated areas of the West Bank. Not much thought has been given to how these new territories will be governed, much less to a larger Palestinian state. Will the Palestinians adopt a democratic form of government? So far the Israelis have shown little interest in this question. Understandably, Israel focuses on its own security requirements, and the Israeli predisposition that democracy within the Arab world is an oxymoron has largely preempted their addressing this critical topic.

William Quandt, a professor at the University of Virginia and a former Carter administration National Security Council advisor on the Middle East, believes the Israelis have found some distinct advantages in being able to deal with Arab dictators. As an example, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt most likely would not have been able to make his historic trip to Jerusalem in November 1977 if he had first been obliged to consult the Egyptian public. Negotiations with Syria's Hafez al-Assad would surely prove to be more cumbersome if Assad had to answer to a democratic government. In reality, very few Israelis feel that more democracy for the Palestinians or in any Arab state will enhance their overall security.[27]

However, Palestinian interest in democracy is currently high. Polls show that three-quarters of the Palestinians

living in Gaza and the West Bank support an election to form a governmental authority for the new territories. Only 10 percent of the Palestinians support the idea that the PLO should appoint a governing body for them.[28]

Why should the Palestinians support a democratic government any more than the other Arab regimes in the region? The stark truth is that the Palestinians have been treated very badly over the years by numerous authoritarian Arab regimes. Their memories of mistreatment by Nasser in Egypt, Assad in Syria and Lebanon, and Saddam in Iraq have convinced many that their new life should not be entrusted to a nondemocratic, one-man rule government.

In spite of the fact that they loath the Israeli occupation policies they have been subjected to over the years, the Palestinians have seen what a pluralistic system such as Israel's can accomplish. They have seen the effects that an opposing political voice has had in a parliamentary system. Palestinians have seen first hand the reins of Israeli governmental power change hands when the policies of an incumbent party have not delivered.

Within the Kingdom of Jordan, the Palestinians have seen in recent years the light-handed governing of King Hussein over an energetic parliamentary system. Elections in Jordan have been relatively free; political debate is given large areas for its conduct. Many Palestinians, rather than criticize the Hashemites, now articulate Jordanian democratic processes as the norm to be followed as opposed to the authoritarianism of the PLO.[29]

The Palestinians' experiment with self-government during this transitional phase will have little chance for success unless they adopt a democratic form of government. This assertion is based on the requirement for economic progress for the Palestinian people. Palestinian society has many characteristics that correspond well with democracy. The Christian minority lives within the world of a Muslim majority with relative ease. Also, the Palestinian people exhibit a large degree of social cohesion when compared to other Arabs. Many Palestinians have been forced to live abroad and many are well educated. A major disparity, though, is the division of wealth among most Palestinians. Many live in abject poverty, while others are living at a

much higher standard. Success for the future will depend on sustained economic development that will allow more Palestinians to enjoy economic prosperity commensurate with their educational level.[30]

In the past, the PLO and Arafat have never been too democratic about control over finances. The Palestinians now require substantial monetary assistance from the international community to support their efforts in the territories. These foreign donations will have to have some visibility within the government or the donations will simply stop. The Palestinian governmental organizations controlling the use of this money will also have to be accountable for the system to succeed. There are many other roadblocks to Palestinian success. The reluctance of the PLO leadership to let go of its current power, Israeli indifference to a Palestinian agenda, and a US policy that ignores the importance of supporting the process of democratization could undercut the whole Palestinian effort.[31]

Democracy will not be a miracle drug for the Palestinians. Democracy will not guarantee that good leaders are always elected, but it does ensure the opportunity to address the problems of ineffective, long-term government, which today is a large problem in the Middle East. A basic assumption embodied within democracy is that the public will recognize when it is being ill served by its government and vote it out of power. This is why free elections are so important as an integral step to institutionalize democracy within the Middle East.

Highest on the Palestinians' priority list are independence and democracy. A Palestinian democracy that borders both Jordan and Israel most certainly would be a better neighbor from a security standpoint for both nations. As a result, a Palestinian democracy would lessen defense requirements for Israel and Jordan. Additionally, Palestinian democracy could be more easily incorporated into a future regional economic system than could an antagonistic dictatorship. The choice the Palestinians ultimately pursue will largely determine the overall peace and security the region will enjoy in the next century.[32]

The future Palestinian system of government will not likely be formed around total dominance by the PLO. New

proactive elements of the loyal opposition from inside the occupied territories will spearhead the new Palestinian agenda for self-government. Faisal al-Husseini, a Palestinian representative to the peace negotiations, summed up this new agenda when he said, "We are fighting to free our people, not to enslave any other people. We are fighting to build our state, not to destroy any other state."[33]

US Policy: A New Beginning

"Ironically, the most significant impact of the Persian Gulf War may have been . . . that the 'wall of fear' separating citizens from autocratic rulers has been broken through, [and] while the great powers applaud participation and exalt democracy, they loathe instability; . . . the achievement of greater participation and democratization without accompanying instability is difficult to imagine."[34] The Bush administration was successful in having the Kuwaiti National Assembly restored quickly after the Gulf War. It set an example for others to follow.

Since then, the Clinton administration has articulated its National Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement, which incorporates advancing democratic processes and expanding free markets. However, the administration is taking a more cautious approach in the Middle East, so as not to jeopardize US interests by creating unnecessary or uncontrollable instability. US officials believe that their actions to pressure Arab governments, particularly Saudi Arabia, will be seized upon by radical Islamists as proof that the democratization process is yet another example of royal families acquiescing to US desires. It appears that for now US foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia will focus on human rights issues rather than on the more contentious issue of major democratic governmental reform.[35]

It is no surprise that radical Islamic fundamentalism is the new force to be reckoned with in the Middle East. Radical Islamic fundamentalists will attempt to undercut any Arab government that tries to balance Islamic religious beliefs with democratic practices. Specifically, they will attempt, and to some extent already have, to derail the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli peace process through the use of

terrorism. The Clinton administration's National Security Strategy of Enlargement and Engagement, with its emphases on promoting individual liberty and free markets, will face full resistance from radical Islamic regimes (Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Libya) and religious threats (Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah) bent on destroying peace and security within the region.

Today, the political playing field for major democratic reform in Kuwait is more fertile. US attempts to connect democracy with the promotion of internal stability continue. As an example, US Embassy officials have designed programs for Kuwaiti judges, police, military officers, prosecutors, and investigators to receive instruction from US counterparts. Because radical Islamic fundamentalists have the opportunity to be heard within the Kuwaiti governmental process, Kuwait may ultimately prove to be the model for regimes in the area in establishing Islamic democracy. Radical Islamic fundamentalists have a large incentive to work their agenda within the democratic system.

In Jordan, King Hussein has co-opted opposition Islamists by obtaining their loyalty to the monarchy as a precondition to each party's right to participate in the democratic process. By contrast, the Saudi model leaves the radical Islamists little choice but direct confrontation with the country's rulers. The possible results of this alternative recall memories of angry Islamists taking power through violent means in Tehran in 1979. Saudi Arabia, however, is a very different country from Shiite Iran.

Finally, we must remember that Americans have been experimenting with democracy for more than 200 years in our own country, and some would argue that there is still much room for improvement. The US, in the role of teacher, needs to be very patient and encourage students along *their* chosen roads to democracy.

Conclusion

The US and Israel are not formal allies; however, the US has a moral and a political commitment to Israel that may go beyond any of our current, formal, treaty obligations. Our commitment to Israel's security is measured by the fact

that the US has provided more than $40 billion in economic and military aid for nearly a half century. This amount more than doubles what the US spent to rebuild a devastated Europe after World War II. As President Nixon bluntly told a bipartisan group of congressional leaders before the Yom Kippur War in 1973, "No American President will ever let Israel go down the tube." It is the only Western-style democracy in the Middle East, and it has been continually fighting for its existence for more than 45 years.[36]

However, much has changed in the Middle East. The threat from the Soviet Union has disappeared. Regional threats posed by Iraq and Iran have grown and are now the largest impediments to security in the region. And when Yitzhak Rabin and Yasir Arafat shook hands in Washington, D.C., on 13 September 1993, that event, we hope, ushered in the final chapters of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Since 1980, more than 1.4 million people in the Persian Gulf region have lost their lives in wars and terrorist attacks. Israel has fought five wars with surrounding Arab nations. This massive loss of lives has not been solely attributable to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Many conflicts have been instigated by Muslims against Muslims and radical Shia terrorism has been exported to numerous moderate Sunni Arab countries, to include those of the Maghreb.

As a product of the Gulf War and the demise of the Soviet Union's influence in the region, many moderate Arab countries are now making small, incremental steps towards institutionalizing democratic processes and expanding civil liberties. It continues to be a very slow process. A sudden surge towards democracy by any Arab nation is likely to give radical Islamic movements quick leverage and could well lead to backlashes and a resurgence in government repression of human rights.

As Anthony Cordesman points out in *After the Storm*, Arab nations can protect basic human rights and enforce a meaningful legal system without copying the Western model. Cordesman notes that practically all Middle Eastern states have formally committed themselves to adhering to the rule of law, though they may ignore this commit-

ment in practice at times. There is no inherent reason that Islamic law should be lacking in its approach to human rights and mercy for its citizens.[37]

From the previous discussion, we can appreciate that democracy and Islam are actually compatible both in theory and practice within the Arab world. Democratic practices seem to be what the majority of the Arab people desire. The US strategy of promoting democracy within the Middle East to thwart the radical Islamists and to complement the free market system will take on new importance as the next century looms. In today's world, where Arab monarchs and despots can no longer court the monolithic Soviet Union for political and economic leverage, democratic processes offer the Arab people an opportunity to participate more fully in the next century's new world order.

To reverse Paul Kennedy's argument that Islam's "retreat into itself [is] due to a long held fear of being 'swallowed up by the West,'" the US and the West must take steps to dispel the perception that we are intent on destroying the traditional world of Islam by insisting on democracy based on Western style and culture.[38] William Quandt believes that "the US should avoid overreacting to the specter of a monolithic Islamic threat in the Middle East." He feels the US should treat Islamic movements, both liberal democratic and fundamentalist, as complex, multifaceted phenomena, and the US should take its stand on a case-by-case basis depending on our interests at the time and place.[39]

In the twenty-first century, it will be in the United States' vital interest to provide the leadership to assist Middle East democracies in all their various shapes and forms. Democracy and some of its associated institutions are among the solutions which the US can offer its friends in the Middle East. There are, of course, other approaches that Muslim states may prefer to explore to fulfill demands for political participation, as this essay has addressed. Above all, the US and the West must avoid fostering the impression that we are trying to force Western democratic institutions on Muslim friends, especially when Islam itself has its own authentically democratic traditions.

Notes

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