



DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST: SOLUTION OR MIRAGE?

A GLORIA Center Roundtable Discussion

One of the most interesting new questions regarding the Middle East is whether a central issue on the region's agenda is going to be greater democracy and internal reforms involving such issues as human rights, civil liberties, more open economies, and other changes. On February 10, 2003, in conjunction with the U.S. State Department, the Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) Center held an international teleconferenced seminar on this question. The seminar is part of the GLORIA Center's Experts Forum series.

The seminar's purpose was to reflect on possible developments following a war that overthrows Iraq's government and replaces it with a more democratic regime. Would such an outcome be likely or stable? How would it affect other countries in the region?

There is no intention here of making policy recommendations or reflecting any political agenda but only in presenting the individual views of several scholars studying the region who are thinking out loud in trying to develop their own understanding of these issues. It is hoped this edited transcript will inspire additional thought, debate, and ideas on the subject.

Dr. Patrick Clawson, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy: Let me offer three models of ways to think about what might happen after an Iraq war, especially if it goes relatively well and Iraq is relatively stable afterwards and there is some progress toward participatory government in Iraq.

The first, and I suspect most likely, is that democratization would be a program the international community encourages, every government announces it will do, everybody claims is being done, but very little happens for many years. At most, there is some slow progress just enough to stave off discontent and to keep the regimes afloat.

A second model which would see rather more change in societies might be a decision by governments--especially in the GCC countries--that some progress on democratization is in their interests. Saudi Crown Prince Abdallah, for example, recently put forth some small reforms such as having elected local councils. Such an approach would be

both bending before international pressure but also deciding that greater public participation would enhance stability and popular support for the current rulers.

Last, and least likely, democratization might be an idea which catches hold, as it has in Iran. In such a case, intellectuals would champion this idea as an alternative to the status quo and win over a serious base of popular support for such a movement. In Iran we do see big debates as to whether or not there can be an Islamic democracy or whether or not it is essential that democracy be secular. Such an idea that would have been anathema a few years ago is now widely debated and I suspect will be widely accepted within a few years. One can even imagine--though it is unlikely--a popular revolution in Iran.

Dr. Martin Kramer, Editor, *Middle East Quarterly*: The question of the absence of democracy has been a long preoccupation of the West. It can be traced back to Enlightenment thinkers of

the eighteenth century, who asked themselves why it was that despotism persisted in the East. I think we all understand that the core problem is the thinness of civil society; this is really the key difference between Eastern Europe a decade ago and the Arab and Muslim Middle East today. There are of course civil society institutions, but they don't exist in sufficient number and they don't have sufficient social depth to allow the self-generation of democratic institutions.

America, as it approaches this moment in the Middle East, needs a theme around which to organize its role. It once had the Cold War theme, followed in the 1990s by the Arab-Israeli peace process, which failed as a set of organizing principles. Now there is a tension between the emphasis on democratization and the "War on Terror." The definition and need for organizing themes tells us much more about the American ethos than about the Middle East. But whatever the usefulness or relevance of the emphasis on democratization, it does seem likely to be the declaratory framework of U.S. policy in the next phase.

To which I would offer here two warnings. First, keep in mind the law of unintended consequences. There are other options in this region aside from despotism and democracy. One of them is chaos and this may be something that could overwhelm a post-Saddam Iraq. A Balkan-like situation, reminiscent of what we saw in Bosnia or Kosovo, is just as likely as a transition to pluralism.

Second, if one is set to break up old structures of authority and enforce a new order based on strengthening the institutions of civil society, there must also be a back-up plan if this goes badly awry. What is Plan B if democratization turns out to be more than the Middle East can bear? What if it turns out to be like the peace process: an over-ambitious episode in social engineering? If there is no Plan B, we could well find ourselves in a situation like that of the United States in Iran at the time of the Iranian revolution. It was declared U.S. policy at

that time to promote human rights. I think everyone who has studied the Iranian revolution has come to the conclusion that American policy undermined the resolve of the Shah and brought about conditions which made possible the establishment of the Islamic Republic--a development very damaging for U.S. interests in the Middle East.

Dr. Patrick Clawson: The outcome depends on how the war goes. If the war goes badly, President Bush is going to be countering the problems. But, if, on the other hand, the war is relatively short, what emerges may not be a particularly chaotic situation but a reasonably orderly situation. If it is possible to form a new transitional authority relatively well, then those in the administration who favor making democracy the project are going to find that the wind is in their sails. Meanwhile, on the domestic U.S. political scene, those unenthusiastic or critical about the war will say, "Well you really haven't accomplished very much because you haven't brought full democracy to Iraq and you haven't transformed the region." In other words, a lot of people on the domestic political scene who wish to criticize Mr. Bush will pick up the democracy theme as the element they would use against him. Both the opportunity to transform the region and the challenge from domestic critics would push the administration further in the direction of promoting democracy in the Middle East.

Ms. Ellen Laipson, Stimson Center: I think that there is a healthy skepticism among American thinkers about democracy as to whether there is an artificiality to this kind of policy objective. It is a little startling both to Americans who care about the Middle East, to democracy-promoters, and to elites in the Middle East, that this is an idea that has come out of excessively ambitious and impatient expectations. This seems a kind of pendulum swing from the previous U.S. position that said, "We have got to take a very very incremental approach to democratization

because it will be too destabilizing” to a sudden enthusiasm for democracy promotion in profoundly non-democratic societies.

I think there is a lot of skepticism that leads to the notion that this is a little bit set up to fail. At the same time, we should recognize that some progress would be better than nothing. We should also distinguish between the monarchies and the non-monarchies. Strange as it might seem, the modernist, secular regimes are less flexible about making changes than are the monarchies. If you look at Morocco, Jordan and now the small gulf dynasties, I wonder if we shouldn't be looking in a way with a little more sympathy or a little more encouragement to gradual change taking place in the monarchies, which are somewhat more secure about their national identity than some of the secular, military-based regimes are.

Dr. Patrick Clawson: That argument has been interestingly modified by the fact that we now have republican monarchies in the most important republican states, namely Syria and Egypt. We are now hearing from Gamal Mubarak, Egyptian President Husni Mubarak's son and possible heir, about what great progress they are going to be making, and about all these political reforms that they have in mind. Syrian President Bashar al-Asad has been supposedly claiming that he is blocked by hardliners in his own regime and that if he had his way democratization would flourish in Syria. So, it wouldn't surprise me if we saw in these two republican monarchies a move towards democratization in the post-Iraq war environment.

Dr. Eran Lerman, Middle East specialist: I think actually the key distinction among Arab states is between those who view themselves as playing a leading role in bringing about Arab unity or leading the region and those who have basically reconciled themselves to being small countries in the Persian Gulf or North Africa with both an Arab identity

and yet a distinctive future of their own. The latter group is more likely to be open to reforms.

Dr. Hillel Frisch, Bar-Ilan University: One might put it this way: if U.S. policy in Iraq succeeds, American foreign policy is more likely to push for reform and if it fails it will probably be more realist. In addition, if the United States does stress democratization, then it is more likely to be applied differentially against states considered radical and unstable more so than other states.

Prof. Henri Barkey, Lehigh University: When you look at post-war U.S. policy in terms of democratization, I think there are two issues involved. One is what we do in a post-war era will be very much constrained by which of the Arab regimes helped us--like Kuwait, for instance--and I don't think we will try to undermine those regimes that were helpful. Second, I am deeply suspicious as to how much commitment there is to a region-wide democratization enterprise or endeavor. It is one thing to talk about democratization now but when it comes to actually insisting on it and pushing it forward, I don't see this or other U.S. governments having the staying power on these issues. People and issues change. For example, note that this administration was not quick to push the Egyptians on the Salah Eddin Ibrahim case [an Egyptian scholar who is a U.S. citizen and who was tried and imprisoned for his civil society research]. What will happen when future such cases occur? I suspect that the United States will herald and champion every single little incremental change, but if democratization comes in the Middle East it will be from internal processes and not from U.S. pressure.

We do actually have a history of pushing democratization in some countries. They tend usually to be very strong allies that already have a democratic history. Turkey is the best example where the United States has in the past done well, ironically shown by the cooperation given it by an elected moderate Islamist government there. The

night of the Turkish elections, the leader of the victorious party even said that one of his great aims is to bring democracy to the Middle East. But, I am not at all confident that the Bush administration, or any other administration after that, will follow through on the democratization path.

Dr. Eran Lerman: This is not a new debate. Many of these questions also emerged early in the Clinton Administration in the context of a discussion on whether that administration should seek to enlarge the scope of democracy. One reason this debate was abandoned was that, at the time, the priority was put on stability in the Middle East in the traditional sense. That is to say, let's keep our friends in power--the Saudis, the Egyptians. Even if this means to some extent maintaining a repressive structure, this was considered better than the possible alternative of a radical Islamist take-over, looking at what had happened in Algeria, for example. But September 11 was considered proof that it is not possible for the United States and many others to tolerate the catatonic stability of repression that has held the Middle East stagnant for thirty years with little progress. Consider the long history of the Qadhafi regime in Libya, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, or the Asad dynasty in Syria, among other models of totalitarian rule.

The new conclusion is that the totalitarian systems in the region must be swept away if anything else is to happen and that American power must play a role in this process. This is a precondition for what Tawfiq Hakim, in his famous book "Return to Consciousness" wrote in his critique of Nasser's rule in the 1970s. This beginning of a debate on the problems of the Arab system was submerged under the pressure of Islamism and the continuing ideas that Saddam Hussein represented. The defeat of Saddam Hussein could reignite this very debate among Arabs. Should they look for another type of totalitarian

system or seek some completely different solution to their problems?

One should not underestimate the existence of some success regarding civil society and building social infrastructure. Jordan, for example, has held up well under recent events not because it is so repressive but because it has the sound building blocks of civil society. Similar points apply to North Africa, even to Algeria where the country's survival and victory over revolutionary Islamist forces owes some debt to what could be called Algerian civil society. One can see such trends elsewhere, even in places like Saudi Arabia. Here again, American power and aid, conditioned on progress towards democracy, could be very important. Jordan has received the opportunity to export \$500 million to the United States in recent years through the Free Trade Agreement. Of course, U.S. policy must avoid being manipulated by factions only wanting it to put or keep them in power but this is inevitable and can be managed. Europe, too, can participate by providing rewards and incentives. There are factors supporting a democratic transition, but it will not happen quickly.

Dr. Patrick Clawson: The goals of accountability and transparency and of rule of law are likely to be what are emphasized as important elements rather than the ability to change the government through elections. The United States is going to be quite respectful of the idea that the way in which political reform proceeds varies from country to country. Others may not sign on to the full democratic vision but they are likely to accept many of these elements. Good governance has now become a buzzword accepted by almost all of the governments in this region, including ideas like accountability, transparency and responsibility.

Prof. Barry Rubin, *MERIA Journal* and GLORIA Center: We should not underestimate the likelihood that regimes will simply dig in their heels and denounce this whole concept as an

American imperialist plot. It seems to me most likely that, with the exception of a few specific countries, very little is likely to happen in this regard. There is a sharp difference between what the United States might want and what regional realities dictate.

Dr. Martin Kramer: If the United States is going to implement a policy of promoting democratization, it will do so toward countries that have effectively become its wards. The arenas in which the United States is already active or promises to be active are Afghanistan, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Iraq. The United States removed the Taliban and is promoting with various means a more pluralistic form of government in Afghanistan. It has called for reform of the PA. Iraq would be a virtual ward of the United States in the aftermath of a war.

I could not think of three settings in this part of the world where it would be more difficult to implement democracy promotion than in these cases. The social fabric in all three settings has been rent asunder by years and, in some cases, decades of conflict and despotism. They all have the urgent task of re-building entire economic and social infrastructures. In short, these are terrible test cases for democracy promotion, much less promising than Egypt or Tunisia or Morocco. But the more promising cases aren't on the American plate right now. This situation leaves me profoundly skeptical. It would be a difficult task in any setting but far more so in a place where you not only don't have all the institutions of civil society, but in some cases the entire fabric of society has been torn asunder. The addition of democracy promotion on top of basic reconstruction is a daunting task. It will be its most daunting in post-war Iraq.

Dr. Hillel Frisch: I'd like to strongly disagree. I think that the characteristics that you just outlined all fit Nazi Germany and Japan to a tee. In fact, all these three elements existed there and the

American solution was relatively successful. There are also differences among the three cases you cite. I think Iraq has a high probability of success because it has oil, a very centralized and profitable commodity. Afghanistan is the worst situation. The Palestinian situation is in the middle because it is still involved in an external conflict which won't, of course, go away no matter how much democratization and how much money is poured into the PA. But I think Iraq stands a good chance of being a successful case because there are a lot of resources. Precisely because there has been such a battle of attrition between the forces within Iraq, they might be quite willing to make a deal under the aegis of a good American-sponsored framework.

Ms. Ellen Laipson: I agree with Hillel that Iraq has some rather encouraging ingredients in terms of some of the preconditions of the kind of civil society needed to create an environment in which democracy may happen. I think that Iraqis are a long way from learning how to be free citizens but if we look at the level of education, range of professional skills, and complexity of the society, it certainly has some of the ingredients for a participatory system.

If the United States intervenes in Iraq, securing the territory and disarming Iraq will be the first order of business. The long-term future of institution building in Iraq is not likely to be an immediate priority. There has been lots of discussion and planning in the U.S. government about what the future government of Iraq would look like. At the same time, everyone is paying at least lip service to the principle that rebuilding Iraq is up to the Iraqis. The United States is certainly encouraging and, in fact paying for, opportunities for Iraqis themselves to get together and talk about this.

At the same time, there is a lot of debate over whether the Iraqis outside the country have the legitimacy to lead a post-Saddam Iraq. There is an important question about how the external and internal Iraqis will work together.

Perhaps there would be a year with some kind of loose coalition of all political forces in the country, with permanent decisions about governance left until later. During that period, a constitution would be written and Iraqis could decide what they wanted.

Among the Iraqi opposition, federalism is taking hold as a kind of organizing principle. I think people do believe that this time they must really implement some decentralization, for example with Kurdish areas having more control over oil revenues. There is talk about a two-house legislature that would allow a Shi'a majority in the lower house and with a balance among communities in the upper house. There has been consideration of a sort of shared presidency with rule by an executive council with Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurdish representation.

Of course, it will be quite some time before Iraqis learn how to be democratic citizens, which would require public education, a free press, getting people over the psychological trauma they have been through and the experience of not having any individual rights. These things will take time. But I think Iraqis are going to behave differently once the yoke of dictatorship is lifted, though we cannot predict precisely what might happen. There could still be some sort of authoritarianism and the desire for an authority figure to make decisions for them. We should certainly not assume that the day after regime change, all Iraqis are going to embrace democracy.

Dr. Patrick Clawson: If the process unfolds as Ellen was describing and this new executive council starts functioning relatively well, then a lot of governments around the region are going to want to go with this trend or at least pretend to do so. In other words, rather than democratization undermining or even leading to the overthrow of existing regimes, what will instead happen is that the regimes are going to add a democratic element to that mix of policies they use in order to gain legitimacy at home and

abroad. So, just as they have added Islamist, economic reform, and anti-imperialist elements when it is convenient, so they will put in this additional aspect and use it to help themselves survive.

Dr. Ofra Bengio, Dayan Center: I am more skeptical about democracy in Iraq and let me list some reasons. First is the heterogeneity of Iraqi society, which made the army the key force for unifying this country. It is difficult to see how the army is going to disappear from the scene, especially after another war in Iraq. Second, there is the weak or non-existent middle class, which was the main reason for the lack of success in the first democratic experiment under the British. Third is the political culture in Iraq, which has been based on an anomaly whereby a Sunni minority rules the Shi'a majority, and it is going to be difficult to resolve this contradiction. Twelve years of Kurdish autonomy may also make it harder for that group to accept a united Iraq, which reduces the degree of self-rule it has enjoyed. Finally, long years of dictatorship make an adjustment to democracy harder.

Let us not forget the fact that for the Shi'a, a federation would be a denial of their majority rule over the country. Moreover, the Shi'a have no clear leadership or even any broad-based organization. In addition, neighboring states will not be happy with a federation. The United States has to deal with that issue, especially Turkish concerns about Kurdish autonomy.

What can one expect nonetheless? I think that the Americans should not raise expectations too high for democratic transition but to leave things more to the population while helping to improve conditions, freedom, and rights as a prerequisite basis for a better society. The Americans cannot and should not dictate to the Iraqis what type of regime they should have. However, they can support those groups who show the ability to reorganize after the war and pave the way for a better situation.

Prof. Barry Rubin: It is important to consider whether an emphasis on ethnic identity in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime would really promote or subvert the country's unity and stability. The proposed system is starting to sound like the Lebanese political system, which at times enjoyed many successes but also broke down very badly. The question I would like to raise is: to what extent is this communal organization inevitable and to what extent is it a mistake? In other words isn't there another route that would encourage the formation of broader parties and alliances on a national level? A system built around ethnic identity, parties, and separate representation could intensify the conflict of interests. What would be created are three distinct nations rather than having Sunnis, Shi'a, and Kurds in the same party having to make deals with each other to gain power and get what they want.

As I understand it, one proposal to reduce this tension is that the federal system would be built around regions rather than ethnicities. There would not be Kurdish provinces but rather one or more northern provinces which just happened to have Kurdish majorities. This would be an important distinction in terms of encouraging local cooperation and national unity as well something that would make Turkey feel more secure with the new Iraqi governing system.

Dr. Patrick Clawson: What Barry describes is the kind of thing that Prof. Kenan Makiya, a leading intellectual in the Iraqi opposition, has been trying to do: the creation of an Iraqi patriotism. The goal here would be to treat each Iraqi as an individual rather than as a member of a community. There has been much interesting experience around the world in dealing with such problems. For example, the Nigerian model, a response to that country's previous, and often bloody, ethnic strife, might be useful for Iraq. In order to be elected to the Nigerian parliament, a party must receive a certain minimum of the vote in each

province of Nigeria. This forces the formation of alliances among people living in different regions. I fear that many in the U.S. government in the immediate aftermath of a conflict would just want to find some tribal or religious leader to deal with as a representative of a community. Instead, it should work with technocrats and exiles, people who share modern, democratic values rather than those who represent traditional interest groups.

Ms. Ellen Laipson: There is not necessarily a distinction between being a religiously active Shi'a or someone interested in Kurdish culture and wanting to be a good Iraqi citizen. People are likely to have more than one identity. This does not prevent building inclusive national institutions where respect for individual rights is emphasized. But people still have these other identities.

Prof. Barry Rubin: The question, though, and no one can answer this at present, is whether such a structure would be dangerously subversive for creating a unitary Iraq.

Dr. Patrick Clawson: The point is to allow for overlapping identities so people can see themselves as being simultaneously a Sunni, liberal nationalist, and pro-free market person rather than freezing things on the basis of one set of identities.

Prof. Henri Barkey: But there is of course a certain reality there of division. You cannot just suddenly ignore that division, which has deepened because of the totalitarian nature of the Iraqi regime. Any new system would have to allow for both. A federal system should actually appeal to neighboring countries since it would avoid either a Shi'a government or a Kurdish state. A federal system will essentially balance the different interests in Iraq. This balance would be a good thing in contrast to a deal based solely on communal differences, which could push the country into civil war again.

Dr. Patrick Clawson: The U.S. government is extraordinarily comfortable with the fact that a future

Iraq is going to have a government in which the Shi'a majority rules. The U.S. government is extremely prepared to ignore the advice it is getting from its friends and Iraq's neighbors that you can't let the Shi'a come to power in Iraq. I see no sympathy for that argument whatsoever in this administration and I think that that is a very correct approach.

Dr. Martin Kramer: Each power seeks to remake Iraq in its image. I am struck by the difference between the inter-war British approach and the present-day American approach to Iraq. The British looked to build upon the sheiks and notables, because they reminded them of their own hierarchies at home. Once they found them, they integrated them into a parliament evocative of the House of Lords, and imposed a constitutional monarchy. It is inevitable that the United States, which has a different legacy, is going to look for the technocrats and the reformers who fit the American model of can-do people who should be running the show.

Unfortunately, Iraq is not what it was twenty years ago. Within the country, the middle class has been beaten down, and the educational level has declined drastically. The high level of education and the great sophistication of the émigré or exile community should not delude us. It simply means that there is now a tremendous gap between those inside and outside the country. At the same time, we should also remember that the Iraqi regime is not just one man, but a whole structure and system that have kept Saddam Hussein in power. So another key question is the nature of the de-Saddamization of Iraq. Will this be an American objective? If the model is Germany after World War Two, let's remember that the entire state was de-Nazified before the transition to democracy.

Finally, if we are speaking of the German model, one should remember that Germany was divided after World War Two to neutralize its power. Is the United States prepared to use force to

preserve the territorial integrity of Iraq if there is resistance to accepting a new order, or indeed if the country begins to disintegrate due to internal conflicts?

Dr. Eran Lerman: One of the reasons for the federal imperative is that the Kurds need this process to leave them at least as well off as they are now in terms of the allocation of resources. I think they will be very reluctant to share in the burdens of what needs to happen in Iraq. Kurdish self-rule in northern Iraq is a reality. It will not go away without being offered something of equivalence in terms of their role in the post-war Iraqi economy.

Dr. Ofra Bengio: About de-Saddamification, I don't think it will be very easy to do this because people connected to the regime are everywhere. We may be talking about one million people who can be described as vested interests of Saddam Hussein. How are you going to deal with them? How will the government function? You will need many of these people in positions of authority.

Dr. Patrick Clawson: The situation in northern Iraq today is much like what the United States would like to see created in a post-Saddam Iraq. There is not one Kurdish regional government in Northern Iraq, there are two, ruling three provinces--two under the Kurdish Democratic Party and one controlled by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. They are territorially based. The idea of territorially based federalism, with multiple areas in which the Kurds have a majority as well as multiple areas in which the Shi'a community has a majority, is a very useful model. Certainly the experience with states that have undergone civil war around the world and have faced breakaway movements is that one is much more likely to have stability if there are multiple political units representing the aggrieved minority group. As for resources, the two Kurdish governments have never received more than about \$1 billion a year from the UN program. It

would not be hard to guarantee them a far higher amount of income in a post-Saddam Iraq.

Of course, when we discuss democratization in the Middle East, Iran has become an extremely interesting example. Many people predict a democratic revolution in Iran. Perhaps they are right. I have to say that the general rule is that regional experts never predict a revolution in any country. Iran has a long tradition of revolutions, including the 1906 and 1911 events, the 1951-1953 era, and, of course, the Islamic revolution. One could say that Iran has a tradition of mass revolutions in a way few other countries in the world have. I am hard pressed to think of any other country that went through such convulsive periods in the twentieth century as Iran did.

It does seem that the social situation in Iran is heading toward confrontation. There is one small group which dominates power, convinced it has the right to do so irrespective of what the majority thinks. And the majority is profoundly dissatisfied with them. My personal view, though, is that an Iranian revolution is unlikely. My reading of the Iranian political mood at the moment is that it is profoundly apolitical and the most striking social developments in Iran are indications of apoliticism and, to be honest, of moral decay. There is a growing amount of drug abuse, the extraordinary spread of prostitution, and the increasing phenomena of pornographic movies made in Iran being watched on the Internet. It is a great place to be in the business of selling clothes and to be doing plastic surgery. In Iran, people refer to the situation as similar to the China model [a system combining political control with more individual freedom], but without the economic growth. The tendency is to keep out of politics, get on with your life and don't expect economic growth. I think that is the more likely direction in which things are going to go.

I do think that Iranians' intellectual dissatisfaction with their circumstances and conditions will be greatly increased if the Iraqis get something that the Iranians see as a semi-functioning democracy. The very common expression in Iran is to refer to Arabs as "barefoot lizard eaters" and the idea that they would have the kind of government Iranians want for themselves would be profoundly disturbing. On the other hand, much of the hard-line faction does favor a regime change in Iraq with more democracy there since this would bring to power a regime that will not be hostile to Iran, especially given the greater influence of Shi'as in Iraq.

Dr. Hillel Frisch: Ironically, of course, America had more staying power to press for a transformation of Germany and Japan because of the Cold War. If Iran continues to be Islamist and a threat

to the United States, the United States has a greater incentive to stay longer in Iraq.

Ms. Ellen Laipson: On the American side, people have, more or less, internalized the idea that even a democratic Iran would still be committed to a strong national security policy, including the justification for having weapons of mass destruction. On the pure threat level, whether Iran democratizes or not, we might still perceive Iran as a country that is a danger to the stability of the region.

Prof. Barry Rubin: There is no country in the Middle East where the attempt to build a democratic order in Iraq would be more popular than in Iran. The irony is, as has been pointed out, the hard-line government is also positive about such an outcome. Let me add another reason for this latter point. Iran's leaders seem to view U.S. involvement in Iraq as such a U.S. preoccupation that the United States won't threaten Iran and, moreover, will need to keep Iran happy enough not to cause trouble in Iraq.

In domestic terms, the Iranian government tells its people: "If you want to overturn us, you have to go to civil war; huge numbers of people will be killed. Our cities will be in ruins. Are you willing to take that risk and take up that challenge?" Understandably, the response of the majority is not to take up this challenge. This deadlock could continue for many years, or there could be an upheaval much sooner. But there is no question that the situation in Iran exists already with a broad base of pro-democratic feeling and unhappiness with the existing order far in excess of anything existing in the Arab world and providing a far stronger model for democracy if they could only get this regime out of the way. But, again, this issue of civil war and violence is a very big one and could deter people from trying for many years to come.

Prof. Barry Rubin: I'd like to talk a bit about how regimes combat proposed political, economic, and social reforms like democratization. A couple of years

ago, Syria's vice-president gave a talk at the University of Damascus at a time when there was a lot of hope for reform in Syria. He was being heckled by Ba'th party people who asked, "Why do we have so much corruption? Why don't we have human rights? Why don't we have free speech? Why don't we have democracy? Why is the economy so bad?" His response was "As long as Israel occupies the Golan Heights, we can't change anything". Of course, by that time, Israel had already offered to return the Golan Heights.

The Arab-Israeli conflict--along with anti-Americanism, Arab nationalism, and the purported defense of Islam--are among the trump cards regimes use so successfully to stay in power and discredit reform. These trump cards are too valuable to give up, especially because a real reform agenda would bring down the regimes and those elites that so benefit by their own permanent rule, corruption, and inefficiency. There are deep vested interests, both among the Arab nationalist regimes and in the Islamist oppositions, who are profoundly opposed to democratization and who are strong enough to stop change, even though this condemns the region to conflict and stagnation. It is easy for them to delegitimize reformers as foreign agents who oppose the interests of Arabs and Muslims.

In contrast, civil society and liberal forces are very weak. They consist, basically, of a relatively small number of scattered intellectuals and writers who, in general, have no mass base or organization. These people are courageous but they are not powerful. Each country is a different situation. I would say Kuwait is a very interesting country because there you have the most dialogue and the most support for such an agenda. In fact, we might come in the next decade--contrary to what was always expected in the past--to view the smaller Gulf Arab kingdoms as the vanguard of progress, reform, and democratization in the Arab world.

Next, the reformers must decide how to make their argument. They can dress it up as a pro-establishment program by arguing that more openness, democracy, and reform will ensure the fulfillment of such traditional goals as destroying Israel, uniting the Arab world, and eliminating Western influence from the region. This makes their lives easier but is unlikely to persuade the rulers.

The underlying problem can be seen in the nature of their proposals. They say, "We want more democracy." The regimes and those who benefit from them ask, "What does democracy mean?" The reformers respond, "it means you can be removed from power and replaced by others." Of course, the response is, "We don't like that idea, what else do you have?" The reformers say, "We want human rights and civil liberties." The elite responds, "What does that mean?" To which the reformers answer, "That means people can criticize you and expose your misdoings. We have economic reform which means that you, the regime and your friends will no longer be able to use the nation's economic treasure as ways of staying in power and enriching yourselves. We want to reduce the power of the Islamic clerics more narrowly to religion and make changes in how Islam is interpreted. This will make Islam stronger, but it will also give people more choices." But in some ways this does challenge normative Islam as well. And so on. Every aspect is quite unattractive to large elements of the Arab world. This is a major structural problem that will not disappear easily or quickly.

On top of that comes a fear of chaos as a result of democratization. When the Syrians wanted to discredit democracy, high-ranking Syrian officials said, "We saw what happened in Algeria, we saw what happened in Yugoslavia." So there are huge impediments to this democratic project that don't exist elsewhere and we shouldn't underestimate them. This doesn't mean that change will never come at all, but we must talk about the time span. Even in France, the time

between the French revolution and the institution of real democracy was a period of about one hundred years. So we are talking about a long-term historical era here.

Dr. Eran Lerman: Perhaps in this context it's useful to think of Latin America. Twenty-five years ago there was very little liberalism in Latin America. It was either a military dictatorship or Communist challenges, and the key structures of the Cold War basically blocked any liberal experimentation there. Within years this entire system was swept away by the Cold War's end and the removal of the totalitarian challenge. In the Middle East, the same repressive role was played by the fear of Islamism. One of the most momentous decisions in the last ten years in the Middle East has been the Egyptian government's decision to walk away from the non-governmental organizations law in 1997 and break the prospect of the emergence of active institutions in civil society. That choice was largely due to the fear of Islamists, even though those revolutionary groups had already been defeated. Now if this shadow is removed or reduced by change in Afghanistan, Iraq, and perhaps in Iran, the opportunity for democratic and liberal change could be much brighter.

Dr. Hillel Frisch: There is no doubt that liberalism is very weak. The best reflection of that are the Israeli Arabs. There are three parties that represent them. One is controlled by the Communist party, certainly not liberal, the second is Pan-Arab, and the third is Islamist. But, there is hope that democracy can flourish. I think there are tremendous possibilities once fear is removed. We can't extrapolate from the past, which existed under such repressive regimes, to a future context where at least the immediate fear imposed by the regime is hopefully removed by an outside power. No one knows what positive forces that could possibly unleash.

Dr. Martin Kramer: I was struck by what Hillel said about fear. The eighth-century Sufi scholar, Hasan of Basra, is reported to have said: "Fear must be stronger than hope. For where hope is stronger than fear, the heart will rot." If fear of Saddam Hussein is removed, must the United States not instill another fear in its place? Will this not require the consistent application of overwhelming U.S. power? The region will not be transformed simply out of respect engendered by the American victory over Saddam Hussein. Will the United States be prepared to replace the fear of the regimes with the fear of its terrible swift sword?

I think it is a very open question. The United States has a long record in the Middle East of not standing its ground or getting its man. It is insufficiently feared; too many hold it in contempt. It will require a long-term commitment to change that perception, and to instill enough fear to make people change their ways.

Prof. Henri Barkey: Aside from the U.S.-European debate on Iraq, I wonder if this split is also going to manifest itself on the issue of democratization? Will the United States get any help on democratization from the Europeans?

Ms. Ellen Laipson: Look at the Balkans as an example. I think that the Europeans believe they have been in general a very positive force for post-conflict institution building, etc. My guess, if it were not for how deep the ill feeling is right now, the Europeans would probably be comfortable in general with an agenda for both political and economic reform in the region. The question is going to be: if they constantly oppose U.S. policy on the war, will that then make it very complicated politically for them to be part of the situation in post-war Iraq? There are NGOs in the region that don't want to take American money but are very happy to go to European institutions for help in building a civil society. On areas ranging from helping research institutions to election observers,

I think the Europeans have a lot of capacity.

Dr. Patrick Clawson: In the negotiations going on between the EU and Iran about a trade agreement, the Europeans have developed their own agenda, which happens to be the exact same points that the United States has been talking about for a long time. But it took a lot of debate among the Europeans to arrive at those same positions, and they have developed some interesting and creative ideas that they want to push the Iranians on. So, I think they can, at times, be helpful.

I am however, profoundly skeptical, that the United States and Europe will be able to work together on a democratization program in the Middle East. The principle reason is that while Palestinian political reform is going to be very high on the U.S. agenda, it is going to be extremely low on the European agenda, because they are going to want an imposed agreement between Palestinians and Israelis as a high priority. Our disagreement about the importance of Palestinian political reform is going to spoil the atmosphere between the two sides much more than has the disagreement about whether or not to go to war on Iraq. My reading of European governments is that even those who oppose a war still want to be there in the process of reconstructing Iraq afterwards. They have been making that very clear.

Prof. Barry Rubin: Having looked at the worst outcome let me suggest the most optimistic outcome, which of course may well not happen. I call this the concept of the third revolution. The modern Middle East has been shaped by two very important revolutions. The first was in Egypt in 1952, which gave birth to the Pan-Arab nationalism that came to dominate the region. The second was the Iranian revolution of 1979, which gave birth to Islamist movements across the region. The question before us can be expressed as follows: "Will the first half of the twenty first century be dominated by a revolution in Iraq which would give

rise to democracy, human rights, a free enterprise economy, and the other features catching on in the rest of the world? This is the most important single question before the region at the moment.

Dr. Hillel Frisch: The critical question is whether this third revolution will fail as the previous two revolutions did.

Ms. Ellen Laipson: In general, this group has been skeptical of major changes toward democratization, discussing factors that make it difficult and show that it is unlikely to happen quickly or easily. At the same time, the Arab Human Development Report shows that, if Arabs view their situation as being caused by a collective failure, then perhaps, for their own standpoint, they will feel that this is a regional imperative. It is also possible that a U.S. victory in Iraq, another clear demonstration of American power, might make more people in the region want to associate themselves with that power. The irony would be the use of a traditional power-oriented cultural concept to show us how much they are democratizing, if they think that is what we expect of them.

Prof. Henri Barkey: I want to underline the law of unintended consequences as well as the many groups opposing change. This is why I was, in many ways, quite pessimistic about American staying power on this issue. The fact or perception of America making mistakes will engender opposition to U.S. policies in the region, including the one we have been discussing here. The dynamics are unpredictable. A war with Iraq and an attempt to promote democracy in the aftermath is going to be an historic event in the Middle East. The results could be a breakthrough or chaos and we need to be prepared for whatever happens.

BIOGRAPHIES

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