problems. Look at Islam and one sees that Islam as a repertoire can provide the intellectual and ideological resources, both for authoritarianism and democracy. Looking at the historical tradition and the experience of modernization, one also realizes that modernization itself may have been a kind of barrier to democracy. By insisting on secular democracy and by creating stronger authoritarian states modernization may have been part of the process of restricting democratization. But in the final analysis many Muslims, numerous Muslims states, and the biggest Muslims societies, have already made a significant transition to democratization.

Islam and Prospects for Democracy in the Middle East

Saad Eddin Ibrahim

Arguments based on racial and ethnic peculiarities that cast doubts on the possibility of democratization in the Arab world need not be dwelled on here, because democracy is possible. Living in the region and being involved in the fight for human rights and for democracy over the years, I can attest to this possibility. Changes have occurred in the Arab world even if they have not been quick or dramatic. Instead, it has been a slow, cumulative process of empowering people, men and women at different levels, at different paces, in different countries. This is what has encouraged me and people like me to continue fighting for democracy and human rights.

The Middle East region's image abroad is one of chronic tyrannies, armed violence, bloodshed, and instability. Although these are warranted impressions, they do not represent the whole picture. Therefore, it is important to ask the following question: How does the Middle East region fare compare to the rest of the world, in both positive and negative terms?

On the negative side, although the Middle East makes up 7 percent of the world's population, it has claimed 30 to 35 percent of the world's armed violence. In other words, it has claimed five times as much violence as it is entitled to. It has had more wars and armed conflict than any other region in the world, although sub-Saharan Africa is quickly catching up. Several factors account for the violence in the Middle East. First is the colonial legacy—with its artificial borders placing various peoples and communities in hardship against their will and aspirations and, more importantly, in conflict, as illustrated by the fate of the Kurds and Palestinians. The most negative and enduring of colonial legacies have been the Balfour Declaration and the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The Balfour Declaration resulted in the creation of the state of Israel, causing a chain of wars and conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis. Likewise, the Sykes-Picot Agreement led to the fragmentation of the Middle East region in order to suit colonial greed and interests. Historic Iraq was one of the greatest civilizations, like the Egyptian and Persian civilizations. But Iraq as a nation-state in its current borders goes back only to 1920. It was put together artificially like Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. This artificial creation of states without any regard to ethnic or sectarian characteristics has resulted in endless conflict within and among states. However, one cannot continue blaming the colonialists and imperialists for all of the Middle East's problems. The ruling regimes of the Middle East have had their share in creating these problems.

The *Arab Human Development Report 2002*[18] noted that the region has lagged behind in all developmental indicators. The total GNP of the Arab world is less than that of Spain and Italy. It is far behind its potential, with three important deficits being freedom and democracy, gender equality, and knowledge and technology. These deficits are again interconnected and result from violence on the one hand and despotic leaders on the other.

The leaders in this region have used some of the grievances that Middle Easterners have had over the last 100 years to justify their tyranny. The Nasserites, Ba'athists, and such leaders as Saddam Hussein, Hafiz al-Asad, and Mu'ammar Qadhafi each made a deal when they came to power by offering a populist bargain. This populist social contract stated that if the population desired to solve the problems of post- colonialism—Palestinian occupation, stagnant development, social injustice, and lack of cultural authenticity—then these leaders would accomplish it at the small price of suspending democracy and human rights, albeit temporarily. Many people welcomed this in the beginning, but after 50 years the populist bargain has still not been achieved. Palestine has not been liberated;

[18] United Nations Development Programme, *Arab Human Development Report 2002*.

Arab unity, stability, and economic development have remained seemingly unattainable.

On the contrary, the Middle East became more fragmented, both during the interwar period and after World War II. People have become disillusioned and have wanted to revise the populist social contract. But they have not been successful because the regimes in power have perfected the art and technology of repression. In his book, *Republic of Fear*,[19] Kanan Makiya talks about the repressive character of Saddam Hussein's Iraq with its brutal practice of frightening a whole population into total submission. Iraq is not alone. There are some 20 Arab regimes that use the same logic of repression and fear against their people, albeit in varying degrees.

Against this background, the fight for human rights and respect for the masses continues. The Egyptian Court of Cassation, the equivalent of the U.S. Supreme Court, is one of the few remnants from the liberal age that that country experienced in the interwar period. The court was founded in 1923 and has a great measure of independence because its judges are elected by their peers, and therefore the executive has limited influence on it. That is the court that acquitted me after three years of harassment, security court trials, and incarceration. These are the kinds of remnants that represent rare positive features in the Egyptian system, which allows a narrow margin within which democracy and human rights activists are working. Although narrow, this is a much bigger margin than exists in Syria, Iraq, Libya, or Sudan. Meanwhile there are growing and restless middle and working classes and a failed state that can no longer hide or conceal its serious shortcomings.

Twenty-one years ago (1983) we started the Arab Organization for Human Rights, and soon thereafter a chain of civil society organizations, think tanks, and small outlets also developed. We had no illusion that things would change overnight, but we believed that the situation would change over time. When we started, there was not a single country in the region that had electoral democracy; even Lebanon, which had been democratic, plunged into a protracted civil war that suspended its democratic system. Today, at least half of the countries in the Middle East have a modicum of electoral democracy. Never mind the quality or their comparability to Western democratic institutions; at least there is a claim, there are elections, and there are parliaments. Not one of these trappings existed 25 years ago.

Culture and Democracy in the Arab World

The debate that the Arab Middle East can never be democratic because of its culture and religion continues. However, democracy is a behavior and like all behaviors can be learned, even if it is not in one's heritage. After all, in most parts of the world, democracy was not the norm. Europe did not have Athenian democracy 2,000 or even 200 years ago. All of these forms of democratic governance are new for mankind. Pope Gregory XVI (1832–1836) issued a famous pronouncement warning Catholics of the world against "democracy" as a repugnant heresy. As late as the 1930s, it was claimed that the Japanese could not be democratic nor the Germans, Slavs, or even the Catholics. However, people who desire democracy are able in due time, despite trial and error, to achieve democratic governance.

Right up to the Portuguese Revolution of 1974, the number of electoral or pluralistic democracies did not exceed 40 worldwide. Today there are close to 100, a remarkable development within only the last 25 years. Portugal, which was ruled for 60 years by dictatorship and tyranny, was able to achieve it. Spain next door, then Greece at the other end of the Mediterranean, then East Asia, Latin America, and ultimately Central and Eastern Europe were all able to achieve it. Now sub-Saharan Africa and even the Arab world are approaching that option as well. The edges of the Arab world, including Morocco, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and non-Arab Iran are democratizing fast. All this fermentation gives hope to advocates of democracy. With regards to priorities, a program of action must be developed and ordered in detail so that the heart of the region (Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia) does not remain stagnant. However this must be developed and worked on by democratic forces in each country, rather than through a master plan by the United States or G-8, for the entire Middle East.

The Liberal Legacy

[19] Kanan Makiya, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

In the face of a populist contract and failed states, there is a desire among many Arabs to retain, restore, and reestablish different forms of electoral democracy. In fact, the Middle East has had its own liberal period during the first half of the 20th century. Many people do not know that a draft constitution was passed in Tunisia in 1864 and that in 1866 Egypt had a constitution—and an elected parliament that lasted for about 20 years and was ended by European occupation. A second liberal experiment began after the 1919 revolution for a period of 30 years, from 1923 until 1952. Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Tunisia all experienced similar democratic experiments as well during a period extending from 1905 to the early 1950s. But in 1948 the defeat of the Arab armies triggered widespread disillusionment with democracies. The defeated armies, instead of looking at the real reasons for the defeat, blamed it on liberal democratic civilian governments, staged coups d'etat, and thereafter one thing led to another. The result has been the region's democracy deficit for the last 50 years.

The West, in addition to leaving the Middle East with a colonial legacy, also, like the Soviet Union, established alliances during the Cold War with Middle Eastern powers and supported them no matter what the circumstances, including the lack of democracy and respect for human rights. President George W. Bush, in his famous November 6, 2003, speech advocating democracy in the Middle East, admitted that the United States had supported dictators for the sake of stability and vowed that this will no longer be the case. In short, such actions by the Soviets and the Americans during the Cold War were an added factor in cementing Middle Eastern dictatorships. Though the Soviet Union ceased to exist as a superpower in 1991, the United States continued its support for Middle Eastern regimes regardless of their form of government for the sake of stability. As the peoples of the Middle East discovered the fallacy of the populist contract 30 years ago, especially after the defeat of 1967, the United States seems to have made a similar discovery after 9/11.

Because of the shift in the U.S. stance, those democrats within the Middle East region who have been struggling for democracy for 30 years are now being labeled by autocratic regimes as part of the American agenda or as "American agents." This is the price that activists and democrats pay, and yet, we are not going to reject democracy because it is now welcomed by the West. It is true there are historical legitimate grievances to settle with the West. But I believe that only democratic regimes can do so with minimal pains.

What Needs to Be Done

Regarding Egypt, which has a strong middle class, what kind of action plan is necessary to promote democracy? First, one must look at the current situation. President Hosni Mubarak has been in power for 23 years, the longest in the last 200 years—that is, since Mohammad Ali (1805–1842). He has a great amount of executive power with no constitutional articles that hold him accountable.

Therefore, the two essential requirements for democratization are limits to tenure in office and the reduction of executive prerogatives, thus making the president accountable to the parliament. These two changes will enable elections to become fair and competitive again. So the first order in a country like Egypt is constitutional reform, fair and honest elections, freedom of the press, privatization of the media, restoration of an independent judiciary, and the right for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to be established without restriction. Similar political measures are needed in Syria and Saudi Arabia. Some 400 Saudi intellectuals last year drafted petitions articulating what needs to be done to achieve political and social reform. Just like Egypt, their focus is on realistic goals and realistic results. In each of these countries there are forces evolving and formulating their demands in a very specific and responsible manner.

Regarding the broader Arab region, outside pressure can also do much to facilitate the process of democratization. One way is for the United States—which has previously attached conditions to foreign aid for economic reform, structural adjustment, privatization, and peace—to add the condition of political reform. Doing so would be one way that an outside nation could assist in increasing the pace of change in the Middle East. Another way of helping is to extend a hand to indigenous democratic forces by helping them with moral support, technical support, training, and access to media, which is the biggest deficit.

People must be given a greater say and be allowed a share in political and national decisions. This must be

done gradually. Interestingly, in surveys conducted by the Ibn Khaldun Center about people's aspirations about the future, nobody talks about revolution any more. Nobody ever mentions Afghanistan or Sudan as a model. Their aspirations are for gradual democratization. The building blocks are on the local community level, more liberal NGO laws or no law at all, because during the liberal age of Egypt, there was no law. When Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power as part of that populist social structure, he wanted total control not only of the state but of civil society as well. So he changed all the liberal laws and replaced them with restrictive laws of his own that killed the spirit of voluntarism in Egypt, which had thrived for a whole century. Unfortunately many other countries emulated Nasser's Egypt in establishing very restrictive laws for NGOs.

Islamism, Islamists, and Democracy

On the question of the Islamists, one must be aware that the repressive Arab regimes need the Islamists, contrary to Western impressions, because the Islamists are a fear-arousing card. Every time the topic of democracy is broached they use Islamists as a scare tactic. Repressive Arab regimes in this way want to convince the West that there is no alternative to them, no middle road, no democratic forces. It must also be remembered that Islamists come in all forms and colors.

For example, Turkey, in spite of the long secularist and antireligious nature of its state, was able to evolve and reconcile secular Kemalism with Western-style democracy. The book *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*[20] discussed in great detail two impulses: the impulse to maintain one's Islamic heritage, which was difficult due to Ataturk's regime and his successors, and the impulse for secularism and democracy. In order to reach a balance, people took refuge in Sufism, which is apolitical on the surface and emphasizes spirituality and communion. But, it was Sufism that for 70 years maintained a modicum of religiosity for the Turkish peasants and the Turkish middle class. Thirty years ago, this movement transformed itself into a political force, with Erbakan and the Refah Party. Though their several attempts and struggles to enter politics were not easy, the Islamists in Turkey were ultimately able to develop a formula for success. They named themselves the Justice and Development Party, after which they participated in and finally won in competitive elections. Their strength lies in their ability to respect the separation between religion and state. In terms of morality and ethics, they do not hide their Islamic leanings; however, they are careful about maintaining the secularism of their government. It is a delicate balance, but they have managed to do well so far.

In Egypt, Gamal Al Banna, the younger brother of Hasan Al Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, is a democrat and a secularist. He has addressed this topic from the depth of the Islamic heritage and has been able to evolve the kind of framework that is rooted in Islam but very supportive of pluralism, of democracy, shura, and of human rights, and respect for non-Muslims. His writings are part of a series of 20 books by different Islamic reformers and thinkers, from all over the Muslim world, and sponsored by the Cairo-based Ibn Khaldun Center. Hence, there is a reform Islam, an enlightened moderate Islam that the world should welcome, instead of the hijacked Islams of the Taliban (Afghanistan) or the Turabi (Sudan) or the jihadi Islam that is frightening to most of the West as well as to our own middle class. Luckily those fanatics represent a very tiny minority in terms of numbers—but the tiny minority has captured all the headlines.

Freedom is imperative for democratic reform. Ibn Khaldun Center, which is not a political party, cannot hold a rally outside even its own building. No political party in Egypt can hold a rally or organize a march, demonstration, or sit-in. They have to do this within their physical premises, which often do not hold more than 100 or 200 people. This is like a human organism deprived of exercise and oxygen; Egypt's opposition parties are then criticized for being weak. In the mid-1970s Egypt had robust political parties; the Tagammu Party for example, had a million and a half members when political parties were allowed in 1976. Today, the membership has dwindled to less than 50,000. The same thing applies to the Wafd Party. The only political force that has access to a growing constituency, unwittingly because of the government's restrictive policy on political parties and CSOs, are the Islamists. In contrast to the secularists, they have access to 150,000 mosques; each one of these mosques holds a Friday prayer, a de facto weekly rally, and prayers five times daily. I cannot

[20] M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito, eds., *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gulen Movement* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

have access to as many people. So as a result, I am deprived, as a civil secular organization, of the kind of freedom and oxygen to exercise and to gather more support. The same applies to political parties. Therefore, grassroots efforts must have freedom of action. Start a small club in school, in the neighborhood, in the town, or the community—that's where one learns the civil skills of citizenship—even those are unfortunately not allowed under present emergency laws, in effect for at least three decades in Egypt and several Arab countries.

In national elections voter turnout is no more than 20 percent in Egypt, but clubs or associations of lawyers, teachers, and engineers have an 80 percent turnout. Why? Because people know that the competition in the latter is real and that their votes will not be rigged or confiscated by fraudulent schemes. When people realize that they matter, they respond. It will take some time to convince them that their vote matters in parliamentary elections. When elections were held, after the 1919 revolution, in 1924 the turnout for those who were eligible to vote was over 80 percent, even though the illiteracy rate was very high (close to 90 percent). The same thing happened in the Palestinian elections back in 1996; and in South Africa, when Mandela returned in 1994. People are eager for democracy, but when they are frustrated time and again they lose interest and hope. The answer to the current malaise is to make a credible, authentic comeback to real representation.

Islam and Politics in the Post-Mahathir Era

Osman Bakar

With the passing of Mahathir Mohammad from Malaysia's political scene, Malaysia enters a new political phase. In this new phase a key role will be played by the new prime minister, Abdullah Badawi, who is already seen in his first few of months in office as moving away from Mahathir's policies. Perhaps he will depart further from his former boss in the next one or two years following the strong mandate he received from the electorate in the March 2004 elections. There has been a great deal of discussion in Malaysia regarding limits on the prime minister's terms. Many believe that the prime minister should serve only for two terms. It will be interesting to see if the idea of term limits will translate into law. However, the real opinion that counts in Malaysian politics is that of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the dominant partner in the ruling coalition, the National Front (BN). Regardless of the opinions of groups outside of UMNO, including its partners in BN, the outcome of any proposal on term limits will very much depend on Badawi's own stand on the matter. At the moment Badawi has not given any indication of his inclination.

Islam and Politics

After Mahathir, Islam will continue to be an important part of Malaysia's political life. Political Islam will remain an influential force in the country. I define political Islam as that aspect of Islam that has to do with political ideas, values, practices, and culture including institutions. Political Islam may be either directly connected to the religion of Islam or to Muslim political history. In trying to predict the future of political Islam in Malaysia, it is important to rely on empirical facts pertaining to Malaysian politics. However, there are empirical political facts that are transient and refer just to passing phenomena, and there are political facts that are more enduring in nature that may help us to foretell better a state's political future; it is the second category that I will discuss.

The first political fact to be emphasized here is that political Islam in Malaysia is not a fringe or peripheral political force. Rather it has been part of mainstream Malay-Muslim politics for a long time, even during the British colonial period. Furthermore, Malay political Islam has been dynamic, able to adapt to changing situations by taking on new forms. The question then, is not whether political Islam will emerge as a central force—since it is already—but rather what shape will it take and how will it change in the coming years? How will the various domestic and international factors influence the shaping of political Islam in the context of Malaysian politics? For example, political Islam as pursued by Mahathir was certainly different from that accommodated by the three prime ministers before him (Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak, and Tun Hussein Onn). Under Badawi, we can expect the character and form of political Islam being pursued to change again.

Why has political Islam always been a central force? The reasons are both historical and demographic. Malay Muslims form the majority of the country's population