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Democratization in the Middle East: Quandaries of the Peace Process

Etel Solingen

The notion that democracies rarely wage wars against each other has gained remarkable acceptance in scholarly and policy circles. At the same time, a number of observers have expressed concern that incipient democratization in some Arab countries may pose a threat to the nascent peace between Israel and its neighbors. Are democratization and peace mutually exclusive or mutually supportive in this region? What are the dilemmas each process poses for the other?

The democratic-peace theory has found significant—but not unchallenged—acceptance among academic experts, who compete in their explanations of why democratic states are unlikely to wage wars among themselves.¹ Some trace it to a Kantian conception of citizens' consent: the legitimacy granted by the domestic public of one liberal democracy to the elected representatives of another is said to moderate tendencies toward violent solutions among democracies. Others aver that free speech, electoral cycles, and the public-policy process restrain the ability of democratic leaders to pursue extreme policies toward fellow democracies. Reciprocal transparency—the joint availability of abundant information on each other's domestic evaluations of a policy—is also expected to stem war. Moreover, democracies respect the rule of law and undertake more credible and durable commitments to each other, which strengthens their reputation as predictable partners.

These reinforcing normative, institutional, and instrumental restraints, however, operate only when democracies face each other—not when they face nondemocratic opponents. In such cases, the nondemocratic opponents' lack of popular accountability, legitimacy, transparency, and

credibility cancels out the otherwise moderating effects of institutional checks and balances that prevail in relations among countries with democratic forms of government.

The absence for many decades of democratic partners in the Middle East correlated with extensive military conflict, both in the Arab-Israeli arena and beyond.² However, Egypt and Israel shifted gears with the Camp David agreement, and more recently, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel and Jordan have subscribed to the notion of a peaceful resolution of conflicts. These developments cannot be traced to the interaction of fully democratic partners; Israel has generally been considered, with some caveats, to be the only democracy in the region. Nor do these developments invalidate the democratic-peace theory, which only claims to create sufficient conditions for the absence of war, but not to be a necessary prerequisite for the outbreak of peace. Thus democracy may not have been necessary for the birth of peace, but will democracy prove a key to its survival? Alternatively, could democratization in the region endanger the cooperation achieved so far?

Experiences with Democratization

Democratization throughout the Arab world has been uneven, slow, and relatively recent, compelling a cautious characterization of this process as incipient. Yet even incipient democratization enables us to differentiate among regimes with varying degrees of democratic attributes, over time (in the same country) and across countries. Democratization involves movement toward a political system that Robert A. Dahl terms “polyarchy,” with elected officials, free and fair elections, inclusive suffrage, the right to run for office, freedom of expression, alternative information protected by law, and associational autonomy.³ These institutional characteristics are universal (even if their strength and mix are not), and cannot be modified by relativist and exceptionalist concepts derived from different religious, cultural, or other doctrinal sources. Democratization involves the incremental attainment of these characteristics: the more elements of this formula that are present in a given polity, and the more fully they operate in practice, the farther the polity is on the path to democracy. I use the terms “nondemocratic” and “authoritarian” interchangeably to indicate a state that has not yet attained such characteristics, even if it has entered some of the initial transitional phases.

By these standards, Israel is the only democratic country in the region, and then only within its 1967 borders. Continued Israeli control over the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza was at odds with most of Dahl's criteria. Progressive withdrawal from these areas, as a result of the Oslo and Taba agreements and continuing negotiations

over the areas' final status, would remove an important qualifier to Israel's democratic character. Even within Israel proper, some radical religious and nationalist minorities wage an unrelenting campaign to undermine democratic standards, and coalition politics helps them achieve significant successes. With these important caveats, Israel remains a democracy—and, many would argue, quite a vibrant one.

Although no Arab state meets most of Dahl's criteria (Turkey and Cyprus are not Arab states), movement toward some of the institutions of democracy is evident in several countries of the region. Morocco was a pioneer in its tolerance for freedom of the press and of association, and its civil society (a strong one by regional standards) has placed some limits on the monarchy. The 1993 parliamentary elections in Morocco were the freest since the 1960s. Until it was torn by civil war in the 1970s, Lebanon embodied elements of pluralistic competition that were rare elsewhere in the region; in 1992, it held its first parliamentary elections in 20 years using a system of highly fragmented communal representation, and despite Syrian military control of the country. Egypt began taking uncertain steps toward democratization with its return to multiparty politics in 1976, but it has restricted political participation through electoral laws and procedures that heavily favor the ruling National Democratic Party. Jordan has experienced competitive parliamentary elections since 1989 and a lively—but recently restrained—press debate over domestic and foreign policy. For the most part, the tentative democratization in Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Kuwait, Egypt, and Yemen is a phenomenon of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The January 1996 Palestinian elections are the most recent and arguably the most advanced, if still imperfect, instance of democratization in the Arab world. Despite President Yasir Arafat's control over the lists of candidates from his Fatah party and despite cases of intimidation by Fatah's security arm and of threats against an independent press, international observers pronounced the elections generally free and peaceful.

Syria, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, and Libya are highly resistant to democratization.⁴ Hafiz Assad's Syria, a highly personalistic authoritarian state, has responded to most demands for democratization with extraordinary brutality. The Ba'ath-dominated National Progressive Front won two-thirds of the parliamentary seats in 1991 elections that restricted political competition mostly to rival groups within the dominant elite. Iran's legislative elections regulate the rivalry between competing power blocs. Candidates without a “practical commitment to Islam and to the Islamic government” are barred from running, a Council of Guardians checks the “credentials” of prospective candidates, and women and non-Muslims lack full political rights. Repression and violence are central instruments of state policy in Iran, even if there is fairly open parliamentary debate. There have been no efforts at democratization by the brutal regimes of

Saddam Hussein in Iraq or Muammar Qadhafi in Libya, except for token and patently fraudulent referenda. Finally, the coalition of military officers (led by General Omar Hassan Ahmed El Bashir) and the National Islamic Front (or NIF, led by Hassan Turabi) that took power in Sudan in June 1989 has actually reversed democratization, and its rule is harshly authoritarian, as the election charade of March 1996 confirmed. Democratization in Saudi Arabia and the smaller Gulf countries has been fairly minimal, although some experts regard the inception of the Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shura) in Saudi Arabia as an important step for an extremely cautious monarchy.

Patterns in the Arab World

The patterns of democratization in Arab countries can be characterized by two basic quandaries:

1) First above, then below? In sharp contrast to Eastern Europe, the Middle East has mostly seen democratization from above: a process launched by state elites with varying degrees of support from powerful societal actors.⁵ The strategy begins with efforts to co-opt influential elites while carefully controlling the expansion of political rights. Egyptian presidents Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak launched incremental democratic reforms, while President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia and King Hussein of Jordan gathered key figures to work out “national pacts” setting forth the ground rules and limits of opposition activity. The Saudi Majlis, whose 60 members are chosen by the king, was finally established in 1993; arrests of dissident ulema and other opposition figures, however, have since revealed the narrow boundaries of political openness. Kuwait held elections for its National Assembly (suspended since 1986) in October 1992, launching limited political reform. In Tunisia, Algeria, and Egypt, the regimes kept control over the content of political programs and party policies, party registration, permits for meetings and rallies, and other political activities. Of course, government-engineered electoral landslides—even if the opposition is in disarray—are a far cry from real democratization. A partial exception to the general trend of democratization from above may be found among Palestinians. There, pressures from below—both within and outside the PLO—have influenced a highly centralized leadership, albeit one that had already begun to negotiate political pacts with relevant elites.

What implications flow from this general pattern of democratization from above? Cross-regional research suggests that elite pacts are a fairly successful formula for peaceful transitions to stable democracy. Peaceful mass mobilization is similarly promising, but violence and insurrection have rarely led to stable democratic outcomes.⁶ Such aggregate evidence should not be taken as a firm basis for predicting democratic stability, but it does suggest that the respective Jordanian and Palestinian pacts

may bode well for the stability of their democratic openings. At the same time, as Adam Przeworski has warned, political pacts that protect embryonic democratic institutions have a real potential to become exclusionary cartels of incumbents.⁷

2) First democracy, then theocracy? Perhaps the most excruciating problem for ruling coalitions throughout the region has been uncertainty about whether democratization will lead to democracy or to fundamentalist Islamic theocracy.⁸ The words and actions of radical Islamic regimes and movements are not encouraging: the Islamist governments of Iran and Sudan have resisted or rolled back democratization, have left little room for dissent, have limited the rights of women, and have continued to rank high on lists of countries that violate the rights of minorities (Kurds, Bahais, Christians, animists) and torture political dissenters. The radical Islamic movements that are challenging the rulers in several Arab countries uniformly declare the establishment of an Islamic state as a central objective. “Palestinian Islamists, including Hamas, dismiss democracy as a Western concept with no place in a Muslim society,” notes Ziad Abu-Amr. The editor of the widely circulated Arabic daily *Al-Hayat*, Jihad al-Khazen, argues that “Muslim fundamentalist parties are undemocratic, no matter what they say.”⁹ With few exceptions, preachers from Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) were openly disdainful of Western democracy during the election campaign of late 1991, and refused to guarantee the holding of future elections if their party came to power. The record speaks against the existence of a strong democratic current among Islamic challengers beyond tactical reliance on elections as a springboard to power. Yet efforts to support groups genuinely committed to both an Islamic and a democratic way of life—such groups do exist—should not be abandoned. The most recent Algerian elections, held in November 1995, illustrate the constructive potential of groups that blend Islam and democracy while rejecting violence. Democratic inclusion can strengthen as well as moderate such movements.¹⁰

Even if democratic tendencies within Islamic movements are found to be weak, it is important to consider the possibility that democratic inclusion may result in fundamentalist electoral strength of no more than 30 percent of the vote. The Jordanian elections of November 1989 for the 80-seat Lower House yielded 22 seats for the Muslim Brotherhood and 12 for independent Islamists; by 1993, their numbers had dropped to 16 and 6 seats, respectively. In December 1991, the FIS won the support of 25 percent of Algeria's eligible electorate (48 percent of actual ballots, with 40 percent of voters abstaining). In November 1995, Algeria's moderate Movement for an Islamic Society—taking part despite threats of terrorism from radical Islamic groups trying to enforce a boycott—carried 25 percent of the vote. President Liamine Zeroual's ability to win 61 percent of the vote with 75 percent voter turnout

forced even the opposition to concede that the elections were “fair and representative.” A senior spokesman for the FIS acknowledged popular support for Zeroual and called for negotiations with him. The Muslim Brotherhood won no more than 20 percent of the vote in the 1987 Egyptian elections. Sudan's NIF has never garnered more than 20 percent (with Turabi himself never able to win a truly democratic election). Tunisia's Hezb al-Nahda captured only about 14 percent of the vote in 1989. Such levels of electoral strength are compatible with what might be called the “balloon theory” of radical Islamic movements, which holds that their rank-and-file supporters are “remarkably mobile in terms of granting and withdrawing their allegiance.”¹¹ The results from the Jordanian elections of 1993, the Algerian elections of 1995, and the Palestinian elections of 1996 support this view. Political inclusion appears to lead to diminishing returns for Islamic movements, reducing their appeal to voters while sharpening their internal divisions. In addition, strong institutional arrangements designed to protect the integrity of the democratic system can help prevent even a small plurality of votes (Islamic or otherwise) from undermining democratic continuity.

Tentative steps toward the democratic inclusion of Islamic constituencies throughout the region have been matched in a few cases by the forceful eradication of militant groups. Egypt has tried the physical elimination of the leadership of extreme Islamic groups, relying on the detention of members of the Muslim Brotherhood presumed to support violent acts, while suppressing fundamentalist candidates running for posts in the legislature and in professional unions. Elsewhere in the region, the armed forces of Algeria, Yemen, Bahrain, and Oman have arrested Islamic extremists and co-opted more moderate groups.

Democratization and Peace

Having outlined the general contours of democratization in the Middle East, I now turn to the relationship between democratization and peace, and especially its concrete implications for the ongoing Arab-Israeli peace process. Only tentative propositions can emerge from a very incipient change in the democratization variable. An influential study by Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder has shown that former authoritarian states where democratic participation is on the rise are more likely to engage in wars than are stable democracies or stable autocracies.¹² Moreover, states that make the biggest leap—from autocracy to mass democracy—were found to be about twice as likely to fight wars in the decade after democratization as states that remain autocracies. At first glance, the implications seem ominous. Yet an analysis based upon the patterns of democratization in the Middle East reviewed above paints a more nuanced—and perhaps more hopeful—picture:

1) First democracy, then theocracy, and then war? Mansfield and Snyder have rightly identified the triad of democratization, belligerent nationalism, and war as an inauspicious historical pattern. Although their focus is the former Soviet empire, the pattern's general applicability to the Middle East becomes apparent, particularly when the sequence "First democracy, then theocracy" is deemed likely. At issue here is whether or not this sequence—democracy, theocracy, and war—is as inevitable as one widely accepted viewpoint holds. According to this view, if democratization is hijacked by radical Islamic movements that then establish theocratic regimes, peace will wither along with democracy. The affinity between nationalism and Islamic movements is expressed clearly in the 1993 charter of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), Article 12 of which states: "Nationalism, from the point of view of the Islamic Resistance Movement, is part and parcel of religious ideology. There is not a higher peak in nationalism or depth in devotion than jihad when an enemy lands on the Muslim territories." And in Hassan Turabi's own words: "The only nationalism that is available to us, if we want to assert indigenous values, originality, and independence of the West, is Islam. . . . It is the only doctrine that can serve as the national doctrine of today."¹³

The operational content of this nationalism is outright opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process, reinforcing the common view of radical Islamic movements as intractable, aggressive, and war-prone. Even the more moderate Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan's al-Ikhwan have so far condemned every step in the direction of regional reconciliation, from the Camp David accords through the Madrid process, the 1993 Oslo agreement, and its aftermath. Radical Islam not only is in the vanguard of opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process, but also has fueled regional conflict within the Arab world and beyond. The Islamic Republic of Iran has exacerbated conflict in Lebanon and the Gulf, has incited subversion and terrorism within the region and outside it, and is rapidly building up both conventional and unconventional weapons. The Bashir-Turabi regime in Sudan is alleged to fund violent opponents of the Arab-Israeli peace process, has launched a deadly campaign against Sudanese Christian and animist dissidents in the south, escalated conflict with Egypt in the north, and armed antigovernment guerrillas in Uganda. Sudan is in a virtual state of war against all its neighbors.

For at least some who emphasize the aggressive tendencies of radical Islam, the key issue is not whether peace and Islamic thought are compatible (they may well be). Rather, it is the current political conditions in the region which, in their view, make radical Islamic regimes and movements the implacable foes of regional reconciliation. Such movements evoke a promise of redemption from both dreadful material conditions and unfulfilled spiritual aspirations through scapegoating and rejection of "the alien." This is certainly no more than a

promise, because there is no evidence that either Islamic economics or the politics of rejection have resulted in more just, more equal, or more productive societies.¹⁴

Dissenters from this interpretation challenge the proposition that Islamic movements invariably subordinate religious and ethical considerations to political payoffs. In their view, Islamic movements advocating a virtuous way of life, religious tolerance, and a willingness to compromise are perfectly viable (although peace with Israel falls largely outside this vision).¹⁵ The political appeal of such movements, absent the combative, messianic, and radical overtones that have prevailed thus far, is hard to predict. Until recently, the more tolerant and democratic Islamic movements seem to have been silenced by militant groups. Yet past performance ought not to serve as the only predictor of future behavior, lest we miss the opportunity to encourage change by recognizing it. Sections of the Islamic opposition to the Palestinian Authority (PA) decided that it was in their interest to participate in the Palestinian elections (contrary to the position of foreign Islamic leaders). It is unclear, however, how much support there is within this Islamic opposition for suspending terrorist activities against Israeli civilians.¹⁶ Renewed Hamas bombing of Israeli civilians in February 1996 made manifest a virulent and uncompromising strain of radical Islam. In 1996, a fully democratic and peaceful Islamic opposition seems a distant hope; still, any stirrings in that direction deserve full attention. In Jordan, for example, the Arab Islamic Democratic Movement, a small group that has women and Christians on its steering committee, has declared its support for the peace process.

To summarize, the present political realities in the region point to at least four possible scenarios connecting democratization, radical Islamic challenges, and the peace process:

1. Democratization leading to a radical Islamic takeover and the creation of regimes of the Iranian or Sudanese type. Prospects for peace would evaporate.
2. Democratization allowing for the political expression of Islamic movements and their subsequent deflation and increased internal fragmentation, as in the Jordanian and Palestinian elections. Continued support for the peace process would be quite likely.
3. Democratization selectively co-opting important secular political groups that were previously excluded, while keeping Islamic forces at bay, as in Tunisia. Regimes could also sustain their commitment to regional peace, but with greater constraints than in Scenario 2.
4. Democratization failing to co-opt important secular groups, but regimes succeeding at the physical elimination of violent Islamic opposition to the peace process (as in Egypt). Such regimes could fail to broaden the political basis of support for the peace process, even while maintaining their commitment to it.

The PA bet on Scenario 2 and won. The result of the January 1996 Palestinian elections thus provides additional support for the “balloon theory.” Although Hamas formally abstained from presenting its own electoral list, some of its members ran as candidates nonetheless, and many Hamas followers went to the polls, particularly in Gaza. Yet only six representatives of Islamic groups were elected to the 88-member Palestinian Legislative Council, with 75 percent of the seats going to Fatah and the remainder to independents.

Arafat won the presidency of the PA with 88 percent of the vote, confirming informal estimates that the appeal of Hamas and its allies had dropped significantly from 1993 to 1995. In fact, given that the elections have placed the Palestinians at the forefront of democratization in the region, it is possible to argue that—at least at this early stage—the appeal of radical Islam appears to be at its lowest ebb where democratization is at its highest. Most important, the prospects have improved for resolving what had seemed a stark dilemma between democratization and peace. As the only Arab political entity ever to have regained Palestinian land, succeeding where 21 Arab states with 200 million people and vast standing armies had failed for decades, the PA is in a position to consolidate its popular support and defeat its extremist opponents. Palestinian statehood is now closer than ever to becoming a reality, and that is no meager achievement, although the outcome of the May 1996 Israeli elections is likely to burden the PA with new challenges.

The sequence democracy-theocracy-war has generally been less of a concern in the Israeli case, where a vast secular majority could always be counted on to prevail in elections. Nonetheless, certain features of democracy in Israel—and the recent turnover of political power there—have amplified concerns about the impact of politically radical fundamentalist groups on democracy and peace alike. Coalition politics has long distorted the essentially secular character of the Jewish state, granting small religious parties a disproportionate weight in securing their political and economic agendas. In addition, after the Six-Day War the radicalization of religious parties—they advocated nothing less than the preservation of Greater Israel—made them natural partners of the nationalist camp led by Likud. That the most extreme and messianic of the ultranationalist movements are a threat not only to peace but to democratic institutions themselves became painfully evident on 4 November 1995, when an Orthodox Jew with radical convictions about

Israeli ownership of the West Bank assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Although the Labor Party's support of the peace process was the imputed motive, the assassination itself was a symptom of a deeper tendency among radical religious groups to place heavy confessional demands on the Israeli state and to adopt intractable postures toward Israel's neighbors.

Although the Israeli electorate is overwhelmingly secular, political support for radical religious parties and movements has risen. In the parliamentary elections of 29 May 1996, three rather heterogeneous religious parties captured a combined 20 percent of the vote and 23 of the Knesset's 120 seats. Within these parties lurks a hard core of religious nationalists who, along with radical nationalists in Likud, have shown a disturbing penchant for violent dissent and pose a genuine threat to both democratic procedures and the peace process. The capacity of extremists to wreak havoc can be seen from the case of Baruch Goldstein, the Israeli settler who massacred 29 Muslims at a mosque in the West Bank town of Hebron in February 1994.

The nationalist-religious victory in the 1996 elections is clearly traceable to radical Islamic terror and to the victors' ability to manipulate Israelis' understandable fears for their personal safety. This victory could potentially lead to a reversal of the achievements of the Labor-Meretz coalition in the areas of civil rights (particularly for women, Arab minorities, and adherents of reformist strands of Judaism). It might also lead to the reimposition of measures that curtail democratic freedoms in the name of "national security."

It was unclear in the immediate aftermath of the May 1996 elections (with a government not yet in place) whether newly elected Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Likud would embark upon substantive—as opposed to merely formal—negotiations with the Palestinians over the final status of the Occupied Territories. The forgoing of serious negotiations would almost certainly harm Israel's budding cooperative relations with the rest of the Arab world. Last but certainly not least was the prospect that the changed political situation in Israel could tip the scales in favor of radical Islamic fundamentalism in the Arab world, weakening the moderate Arab regimes that have done the most for both democracy and peace.

2) First above, then below, and then peace? The "top-down" quality that characterizes democratization where it has occurred in the region has also marked the peace process. Political leaders, moved by a concern for their own political survival, have sought peace in part because they want to shift resources to the task of socioeconomic reconstruction. Nor has this "peace from above" approach been restricted to the Arab world. In September 1993, Israel's Labor-Meretz coalition presented the public with a *fait accompli* in the Declaration of Principles, and saw its approval rating soar overnight to 65 percent. At the

same time, support for the Oslo agreement among Palestinians in the Occupied Territories was similarly high. “Peace from above” need not be undemocratic if daring incumbents eventually face the electoral consequences of their foreign-policy decisions. The PA has done so and prevailed politically, while Israel's Labor Party has paid a heavy political price.

The slow and carefully controlled pace of democratization in the Arab Middle East is certainly less than ideal, but it offers at least one redeeming advantage. As Mansfield and Snyder point out, sudden leaps from authoritarianism to democracy increase the likelihood of war; gradualism may not only guard against this unwanted side effect, but also help to ensure stabler democratic outcomes. As the literature on democratic transitions suggests, piecemeal democratization through political pacts is well suited to introduce strong and irreversible democracy. Stable democracies, in turn, are important building blocks of zones of peace. Threats to peace remain during the transitional phase, though one should not forget that transitional regimes have been in the vanguard of peacemaking in the Arab Middle East. Jordan, Egypt, and the Palestinians have gone the farthest toward normalizing relations with Israel, and Morocco and Tunisia have supported a peaceful new regional order. It is the unchanged autocracies—of whatever ideological stripe—that have remained the most belligerent and intractable. Experts rate the chances of any full autocracy—Syria, Iraq, Iran, or the Sudan—rapidly turning democratic as so remote that one need have little fear of the “sudden transition-increasing bellicosity” problem. Nonetheless, few who know the region are optimistic that today's autocracies, however stable, can be viable partners in the creation of a stable, peaceful regional order. The ongoing academic and policy wars regarding Hafiz al-Assad indicate growing concern with Assad's worth and credibility as a peace partner.

A more immediate threat than overly swift transition is the prospect that democratization from above will bog down, perhaps even to the point where the recrudescence of authoritarianism becomes possible. Mansfield and Snyder found that movement toward autocracy (including autocratic reversion after failed experimentation with democracy) boosts the likelihood of war. This linkage reflects the skill with which aspiring or resurgent authoritarians may use democratic political openings to launch nationalist and confessional appeals to enhance their own populist legitimacy while dismantling the democratic process itself. This pattern is in keeping with the political use of Islam throughout the region. None of this is to say that regimes currently undergoing democratization are

destined to experience regression toward authoritarian populism, whether Islamic or nationalist. The prospects for such regression will increase, however, if market-based reforms fail to transform the economies of the region. Economic restructuring is central to the connection between peace in the Middle East and democratization.

If democratization from above succeeds in maintaining a genuine democratic opening among Arab states participating in the peace process, the leaders of these states are unlikely to find themselves discredited for having embraced the cause of regional accommodation (although the recent Israeli election results make their situation far more precarious). King Hussein and the PA are the models here. Growing democratization could continue hand in hand with efforts to construct a regional order compatible with socioeconomic and political reconstruction. This should not be conceived as a rosy scenario; leaders of democratizing, accountable polities could well be forced to drive harder bargains. Should democratization stall, however, and should these leaders fail to deliver greater prosperity and more freedom, their other achievements could be undermined. Political challengers—secular and Islamic alike—might then succeed in dressing up their opposition to peace negotiations in prodemocracy rhetoric. It is doubtful, however, that a return to the “remote” (i.e., pre-1993) past would be feasible for any Middle Eastern regime that wants to survive in the face of its people's demands for an improved present and a brighter future. This underscores, once again, the centrality of economic performance to both democratization and peace.

The Road Ahead

Democratization and peace must be considered together if one wishes to understand the dynamics of political change in the Middle East. Peace is an important requirement for the effective implementation of political reform, while democratization influences both the political will and the political ability to pursue peaceful regional arrangements. So far, the fit between efforts to democratize the polity and to embrace the peace process has been rather good, as the cases of Jordan and the Palestinians attest. Moreover, controlled democratization obviates Mansfield and Snyder's “sudden transition-increased bellicosity” problem and improves prospects for democratic stability, even though the dangers of stalling and backsliding remain. The ideal sequence of a relatively smooth and linear transition to fully democratic and peaceful polities in the near future is far from guaranteed. Radicalizing political trends in Israel have no marginal impact on this double transition.

Whether democratization will lead to democracy or theocracy remains an open question. Prediction is risky in a region where both governmental and social coercion discourage people from saying what they really think about political options and issues. People's unwillingness to reveal

their true preferences increases uncertainty and can conceal what Timur Kuran has termed “bandwagons in formation.” Some analysts see bandwagons forming on the Islamist path, and expect that where radical Islamic challengers prevail they will not only emasculate democracy, but shelve peace overtures as well. Others, pointing to the Islamic bloc's unimpressive showings in a number of countries, including in the 1996 Palestinian elections, warn against assuming that an Islamic revolution will sweep all before it. Indeed, if the “balloon theory” is correct, democratization and political inclusion may help moderate opposition to the peace process by placing violent strands of opposition beyond the pale. At the same time, the affinity between democracy and peaceful overtures on the one hand, and Islamic principles on the other, will become more empirically relevant if—and when—Muslim leaders who speak for that affinity prevail over rival claimants to the Islamic heritage.

Both democratization and peace feed on a third transition affecting the Middle East: economic reform. In fact, as noted elsewhere, the incipient foundations of peace in the region can be traced to the imperatives driving economic liberalization. Coalitions advancing economic liberalization have more often than not embraced the peace process for both economic and domestic political reasons.¹⁷ Conversely, statist, nationalist, confessional, and populist coalitions resistant to economic liberalization have also rejected both bilateral and multilateral peace negotiations. Thus observers interested in assessing when democratization favors peace would do well to note the political-economic makeup of the ruling coalitions steering democratization in one country or another. If economic reforms lag and distributive issues receive scant attention, then prospects for democracy, prosperity, and peace will all suffer.

The consolidation of a genuine democratic opening that is sensitive to the distributional impact of economic liberalization may be a necessary condition for sustaining a peace negotiated from above. The actual coming of lasting peace in the Middle East may have to await a far tomorrow, but that should not discourage today's efforts to understand how the region's peoples may get from here to there.

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Footnotes

1. For a bibliographic survey of contending hypotheses, see Etel Solingen, "Democracy, Economic Reform, and Regional Cooperation," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 8 (January 1996): 79–114. For a more extended treatment of democratization and peace in the Middle East, and of the centrality of economic reform to the implementation of both, see Etel Solingen, "Political and Economic Liberalization and the Middle East Peace Process" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Chicago, 22–26 February 1995).
2. As Bruce Russett argues, placing the Lebanese-Israeli encounters of 1948 and 1967 in the "war between democracies" category stretches the definition of democracy (and that of war). See his *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 18.
3. Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 221. On definitional debates regarding democracy in the Middle East, see Bernard Lewis, "Islam and Liberal Democracy: A Historical Overview" and Mohamed Elhachmi Hamdi, "Islam and Liberal Democracy: The Limits of the Western Model," *Journal of Democracy* 7 (April 1996): 52–63 and 81–85. See also Michael C. Hudson, "Obstacles to Democratization in the Middle East," *Contention* 5 (Winter 1986): 81–106.
4. Muhammad Muslih and Augustus R. Norton, "The Need for Arab Democracy," *Foreign Policy* 83 (Summer 1991): 3–19; Steven Heydemann, "Taxation Without Representation: Authoritarianism and Economic Liberalization in Syria," in Elli Goldberg, Resat Kasaba, and Joel Migdal, eds., *Rules and Rights in the Middle East: Democracy, Law, and Society* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 69–101; Fred H. Lawson, "Domestic Transformation and Foreign Steadfastness in Contemporary Syria," *Middle East Journal* 48 (Winter 1994): 47–64; Shaul Bakhash, "Iranian Politics Since the Gulf War," in Robert B. Satloff, ed., *The Politics of Change in the Middle East* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1993), 63–84; Farzin Sarabi, "The Post-Khomeini Era in Iran: The Elections of the Fourth Islamic Majlis," *Middle East Journal* 48 (Winter 1994): 89–112.
5. Rex Brynen, Baghat Korany, and Paul Noble, eds., *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1995); Ilya Harik, "Pluralism in the Arab World," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (July 1994): 43–56; Hanna Y. Freij and

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6. Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe C. Schmitter, "Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe," *International Social Science Journal* 53 (May 1991): 269–84. On pacted transitions in the Middle East, see John Waterbury, "Democracy Without Democrats? The Potential for Political Liberalization in the Middle East," in Ghassan Salamé, ed., *Democracy Without Democrats?* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994), 23–47.

7. Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 90.

8. I follow As'ad AbuKhalil in using "Islamic fundamentalism" to refer to "all those movements and groups that aspire to the complete application of Islamic laws, as interpreted by leaders of the movements, in society and the body politic." See As'ad AbuKhalil, "The Incoherence of Islamic Fundamentalism: Arab Islamic Thought at the End of the 20th Century," *Middle East Journal* 48 (Autumn 1994): 677. Not all Islamic political movements are fundamentalist. See Timothy D. Sisk, *Islam and Democracy: Religion, Politics, and Power in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1992).

9. Ziad Abu-Amr, " Hamas: A Historical and Political Background," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22 (Summer 1993): 18; Jihad al-Khazen, "Interview: Editor of Al-Hayat," *Middle East Policy* 3 (April 1995): 71. On the explicit and forceful condemnation of democracy by the most popular Muslim preachers throughout the Middle East, see Emmanuel Sivan, "Eavesdropping on Radical Islam," *Middle East Quarterly* 2 (March 1995): 13–24. On Algeria's FIS, see Michael C. Dunn, "Algeria's Agony: The Drama So Far, the Prospects for Peace," *Middle East Policy* 3 (1994): 145–56.

10. Roy P. Mottahedeh, "The Islamic Movement: The Case for Democratic Inclusion," *Contention* 4 (Spring 1995): 107–27; and Graham Fuller, "A Phased Introduction of Islamists," in Yehuda Mirsky and Matt Ahrens, eds., *Democracy in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.:

Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993), 21–30. For a differing view, see Mohammed A. Hermassi, “Islam, Democracy, and the Challenge of Political Change,” *ibid.*, 41–52. On recent democratic Islamic thinking, see Robin Wright, “Islam and Liberal Democracy: Two Visions of Reformation” and Abdou Filali-Ansary, “Islam and Liberal Democracy: The Challenge of Secularization,” *Journal of Democracy* 7 (April 1996): 64–75 and 76–80.

11. Augustus R. Norton, “The Challenge of Inclusion in the Middle East,” *Current History* 94 (January 1995): 2. On the “balloon effect,” see the interview entitled “Eric Rouleau Talks About the Peace Process and Political Islam,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22 (Summer 1993): 45–61. On the need to avoid basing policies on inflated claims of fundamentalist support, see Timur Kuran, “Fundamentalist Economics and the Economic Roots of Fundamentalism: Policy Prescriptions for a Liberal Society,” in Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalism and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

12. Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder, “The Dangers of Democratization,” *International Security* 20 (Summer 1995): 1–33. See also the pioneering collection edited by David Garnham and Mark Tessler, *Democracy, War, and Peace in the Middle East* (cited in note 5 above). On the Israelis and Palestinians, see Edy Kaufman, Shukri B. Abed, and Robert L. Rothstein, eds., *Democracy, Peace, and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1993).

13. “Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) of Palestine: Special Document,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22 (Summer 1993): 122–34. Turabi is quoted in Milton Viorst, “Sudan's Islamic Experiment,” *Foreign Affairs* 74 (May–June 1995): 54–55.

14. On the failure of Islamic regimes to provide genuine economic alternatives and to achieve redistribution, see Kuran, “Fundamentalist Economics,” and Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

15. For an example of such a “dissenting” account that does not include Arab-Israeli peace in its benign vision of political Islam, see John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

16. According to one poll, in August–September 1995, 18.3 percent of Palestinians surveyed in the West Bank and Gaza supported armed attacks against Israeli civilians. When asked specifically about attacks on Israeli settlers, 69.2 percent expressed their support—a figure higher even than the 67.6 percent who favored assaults against armed Israeli targets. See Khalil

Shikaki, “Results of Public Opinion Poll #19” (Survey Research Unit, Center for Palestine Research and Studies, Nablus, Jordan, August–September 1995).

17. Solingen, “Political and Economic Liberalization and the Middle East Peace Process,” and “Economic Liberalization and Regional Security” (unpubl. ms., University of California-Irvine, 1996). On the centrality of economic strategies, see Robert L. Rothstein, “Cooperation Across the Lines: Constraints and Opportunities,” in Kaufman et al., eds., *Democracy, Peace, and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 289–306.