DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST:
EXTERNAL STRATEGIES AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

Caterina Perlini

Democracy in the Middle East:

External Strategies and Domestic Politics

Caterina Perlini

IRIA Report No. 10

December, 2015

International Relations Insights & Analysis (IRIA) is a research institute focusing on critical issues that threatens international peace & security. IRIA investigates and offers research and analysis on security, energy, terrorism, foreign affairs as well as global political agendas. We formulate concise and meaningful research presented in an interesting and interactive manner. IRIA special reports include experts' opinion, special features, cost & benefit analysis, examine risk & opportunities, as well as evaluate threats and suggest countermeasures. The key findings of reports and analysis highlight pragmatic policy options and revise strategies.

IRIA also offers client-based specialized reports, backgrounders and analysis on foreign affairs, political issues, global agendas to officials, policy-makers and academics. To get IRIA exclusive reports, featuring critical analysis, experts' opinion and policy recommendations, contact at editor@ir-ia.com.

For more information visit: www.ir-ia.com

Table of Contents

1.   Introduction

Authoritarian governments in the Middle East, particularly in the region's Arab core, have largely remained resistant to the processes of democratization that have engulfed other parts of the world since the 1970s. This period is associated with the third wave of democratization that began in Southern Europe in the mid-1970s, spread to South America in the early 1980s and reached East, Southeast and South Asia by the late 1980s. The end of the 1980s witnessed a rise of transitions from Communist authoritarian rule in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, as well as a trend toward democracy in Central America and South Africa.[1] This wave, however, did not reach the Middle East. In fact, the region is not only strikingly less politically free than any other region, but according to Freedom House's annual reports, it is also slightly less so today than it was in the 1980s.[2] During the last quarter of a century, not one Arab leader has been removed from office through competitive elections. In this, the Middle East has experienced the fewest regime changes on average among predominantly non-OECD regions. [3]

During the mid-and late 1980s, a number of countries in the Middle East had engaged in political liberalization and democratization. This was partly a result of escalating popular dissent with authoritarian leaders that caused major riots in opposition to the established political order. These domestic pressures led to political progress in such countries as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Jordan.[4] Each of these countries experienced an increase in political activity, in particular through elections that contained some degree of transparency. Yet, not only has progress towards genuine political change remained slow across the entire region, but it has also encountered steep decline. Countries that intended to liberalize their political systems have maintained restrictions on political participation and competition, hereby limiting opposition and guaranteeing the survival of

---

[1] Huntington (1991), p.15
[2] 'Freedom of the World 2011: The Authoritarian Challenge to Democracy',
http://www.freedomhouse.org/images/File/fiw/FIW%202011%20Booklet_1_11_11.pdf, July 22, 2011
[3] Noland (2005), p.1
[4] Garnham (1995), pp. x-xi - Introduction

the regime in place. There has also been a significant amount of backsliding. In the case of Algeria for instance, efforts of democratic progress were put on hold in the early 1990s, reverting back to authoritarian military rule.[5] Recent signs of political change in the region were equally followed by further backsliding in 2010. In Egypt for instance, the parliamentary elections of 2005 were hailed as a major sign of democratic success. However, the limited pluralism that marked the 2005 elections soon deteriorated, giving way to widespread repression, opposition crackdown and fraud during the 2010 vote. Similarly, the Egyptian media, which had witnessed limited openings during the past several years, faced the closure of various publications and the arrest of several journalists.[6] In the Gulf States, Kuwait experienced a decline of its civil liberties since 2010, due to 'restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of assembly'[7] and Bahrain carried out a campaign of repression directed against the country's majority population of Shia Muslims.[8]

In December 2010, after a long period of absence, a strategic player returned to the political stage of the Middle East: the people. In Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Oman, and Libya protesters flooded the streets demanding accountable government and in some cases, regime change. In Tunisia and Egypt, this populist wave overthrew two of the region's most resilient dictators. Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia had been in power for 24 years and was ousted in January of this year. Similarly, Egypt's Hosni Mubarak surrendered his powers in February 2011, ending his thirty year long presidency. Despite these recent stirrings, thirty years after the beginning of the third wave, political liberalization in the region has still largely failed to remove incumbent elites and empower their opponents.

---

[5]Farley (March 1993), 'Algeria: Democracy 'on hold'.', http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2242/is_n1526_v262/ai_13810537/?tag=mantle_skin;content, August 04, 2011

[6] 'Freedom in the World 2011: The Authoritarian Challenge to Democracy', http://www.freedomhouse.org/images/File/fiw/FIW%202011%20Booklet_1_11_11.pdf, p, 5, July 22, 2011

[7] Ibid, p.5

[8] Shia is one of two denominations in Islam, the other being Sunni Islam. Shias make up an estimated 10% of the Muslim population and are mostly located in Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Yemen and parts of Afghanistan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey. Sunnis account for an estimated 90% and are found all over the world. See: Shora, Nawar (2009), p.33

In light of these events, the onset of the twenty first century shows an Arab world that has largely missed the opportunity to move towards democracy, human rights, and economic as well as social progress on a variety of fronts. However, domestic demands for democratic reforms are increasing and are likely to remain at the core of political life. For now, not one successful democracy has emerged in the Arab world, where one-party states continue to thrive.[9] Nor in the words of Lebanese journalist Hazem Saghia, 'has a leader emerged amongst us that would have the modesty of Nicaraguan dictator Daniel Ortega who accepted without bloodshed the result of the peaceful elections that demoted him'.[10] Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2011* report, supports these assumptions, stressing that thirteen out of sixteen Arab countries classify as 'not free'; the exceptions being: Lebanon, Morocco and Kuwait, graded as 'partly free'.[11] In this, Arab countries are recognised as commonly manipulating elections and the media, as well as oppressing non-governmental organizations.

This story of the Middle East's struggle with democracy and of the forces that have made the region resistant to democratization for such a considerable period of time, as well as those that are increasingly pushing for change today, is the subject of this paper's investigation. What factors - external and internal - explain the current level of (non)-democratization in the Middle East? Moreover, given recent democratic stirrings, what are the prospects for successful transition to democracy? The basic answer of this study is that the contemporary weak state of democratization in the Middle East is as much a result of international influences as of domestic forces and calculations. For decades, external influences have provided financial and legitimacy resources that have supported autocratic regimes in the Arab world. Meanwhile, authoritarian governments in the Middle East have proved proficient at allocating power and wealth in the hands of the central state, heavily investing in coercive security apparatuses to suffocate external as well as internal pressures for democratic reform. However, international pressures for democratization coupled with the wide

---

[9] Rubin (2002), pp. 22-23
[10] Saghia (2001)
[11] 'Freedom in the World 2011: The Authoritarian Challenge to Democracy', http://www.freedomhouse.org/images/File/fiw/FIW%202011%20Booklet_1_11_11.pdf, July 22, 2011

reaching effects of globalization and the tremendous changes in the region's demographics, have increased political awareness throughout the Middle East and provoked a relentless momentum for change. Thus, although the region still faces major obstacles to successful democratization, demands for just and transparent government will likely remain a central part of Arab political life.

1.1 Literature Review

The concern over issues of democracy in the Middle East has been prevalent among academics since the end of the Cold War and the subsequent third wave of global democratization, from which the Middle East was largely exempt. It appeared that there were a number of 'hybrid regimes' in the Arab world.[12] Thus, the remarkable resilience of authoritarianism in the region has produced a great amount of scholarship. The literature is filled with hypotheses, speculative conclusions and theories about the core forces behind the democracy deficit in the Middle East. Books with titles like Raphael Patai's, *The Arab Mind* published in 1973 and Ellie Kedourie's, *Democracy and Arab Political Culture* issued in 1992, emphasize the type of overgeneralizations the Arab world has been subjected to. They pose a provocative, reductionist and overly culturalist thesis arguing that it is the Arabs and Arab culture itself that impedes democratic politics. Similarly, Samuel Huntington's 1996 *Clash of Civilizations* explains that Islam is incompatible with democratic values and speaks of 'Islam's bloody borders', claiming that wherever the Islamic world collides with other civilizations, conflicts emerge.[13]

As time progresses however, these findings are disputed by more nuanced evaluations of Arab politics. Published in the mid-1990s, David Garnham's *Democracy, War and Peace in the Middle East* exposes the role of conflict in shaping the democracy deficit in the Middle East, especially with regards to the ever-lasting Arab-Israeli conflict. Perhaps, the most extensive and informative English-language source on the Arab democracy deficit is *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World*, published in 1995 and edited by Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Noble. This work

---

[12] Diamond (2002) 'Thinking About Hybrid Regimes'
[13] Huntington (1996), pp. 254-255

consists of a variety of analyses from a large number of experts on Arab politics, from the Middle East, North America and Europe, such as Lisa Anderson, Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Michael Hudson, Mervat Hatem, Gregory Gause and Daniel Brumberg. Their assessment of the issue of political change in the Middle East is mainly fair, and attempts to take into account the wide variety of internal and external forces shaping democratization in the Arab context. In particular, it highlights the importance of economics, civil society and international relations, over cultural prerequisites. More recently, Mehran Kamrava in her *The Modern Middle East: A Political History since the First World War* published in 2011, is one of few authors of recent texts to provide for a thorough examination of the political history of the modern Middle East since the demise of the Ottoman Empire. This volume provides for the historical substance of this dissertation. From an insider perspective, Barry Rubin's *The Tragedy of the Middle East* published in 2002, aims to highlight the complex and nationally specific interrelations between rulers (monarchic, theocratic or secular authoritarian), Islamists and reformers in each Arab state. Rubin disputes the idea of a clash between 'Western' and 'Arab' culture, instead advancing the notion of a clash of civilizations taking place within the Arab world. In this, he invalidates the conception of a particularly cultural Arab exceptionalism that has led to political stagnation. Moreover, he reminds the reader that Egypt was an electoral democracy at a time when Spain, Italy and Germany were ruled by fascism and maintains that 'nobody talked about Islam or the character of Arab society as preventing the rise of democracy until more recent developments'.[14]

For contemporary perspectives on democratization in the Middle East, this paper draws on such sources as Eva Bellin's 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East' published in 2004, which provides insight into the crucial role of the coercive apparatus of Arab dictatorial regimes in repressing democratic practices. Bellin highlights that the factors explaining the Middle East's democracy deficit are not unique to the region. Instead, what is exceptional in the Arab world is the combination of these factors. Likewise, Marsha Pripstein Posusney and Michele Penner

---

[14] Rubin (2002), pp.16-19

Angrist's co-edited volume on *Authoritarianism in the Middle East* (2005) emphasizes that among the structural factors explaining the lack of democracy such political institutions as government agencies, parties and elections are particularly important. Similarly, Jason Brownlee's book entitled *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (2007) puts forward that what differentiates unstable regimes from durable dictatorships is mainly institutional differences in the form of political parties, which structure elite relations and dominate national affairs.[15] For an investigation of the external forces shaping Arab politics, *The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East* published in 2010 and edited by Nathan Brown and Emad Shahin is useful in that it provides an analysis of Arab politics by experts originating from the Middle East itself. The book argues that democracy is increasingly gaining roots in the Middle East, yet its analysis is limited in that it merely offers case studies of several Arab countries. Katarina Dalacoura's 'US Democracy Promotion in the Arab Middle East since September 11' published in 2005, offers a clear analysis of the role of external influences in maintaining autocracy on one hand, and promoting democracy on the other.

Finally, for a perspective on the prospects of democratic change in the Arab world, this paper refers to recent issues of *Foreign Affairs* magazine. In particular, Lisa Anderson's 'Demystifying the Arab Spring' (2011), explains the key differences between the countries that have recently experienced revolts such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria, and most importantly highlights the pivotal role of the military in leading the transition period in Tunisia and Egypt, as well as in cracking down on the opposition in Syria and Libya. Similarly, Jack Goldstone's 'Understanding the Revolutions of 2011' (2011) and Dina Shehata's 'The Fall of the Pharaoh' (2011), analyse the current political situation in the Middle East and highlight the social and economic problems, such as high levels of unemployment and corruption, that have inspired recent pushes for democratization. At last, Gregory Gause provides a limited amount of answers to the question as to 'Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring' (2011), stressing the importance of the effects of economic liberalization and a new kind of pan-Arabism in bringing about the Arab revolts.

---

[15] Brownlee (2007), pp.2-3

1.2 Methodology of Research

This paper seeks to contribute to the aforementioned literature on democratization in the Middle East by analyzing the interplay of internal as well as external factors that has shaped the political environment in the Arab world. It dismisses the assumption that democracy is incompatible with the Middle East because of cultural reasons. Instead, it argues that the lack of democracy in the Arab world can be explained by its strategic situation that has attracted foreign involvement, the ever-lasting presence of regional and international conflicts, as well as deep rooted economic and social factors that have inhibited democratization. On the other hand, contemporary forces shaping political change in the Middle East are increasingly emanating from the inside and are pushing for greater political participation and just representation. To investigate these assumptions, a qualitative research methodology is used, relying on the analysis of primary and secondary academic sources. This is done through textual and content investigation of books and articles published by academics specialized in Middle East politics, as well as through the examination of reports, print and web-based, of such organisations as the United Nations that actively shape the political environment of the Middle East. In this, the yearly Arab Human Development Report and the Freedom House criteria are particularly relevant in understanding the issue of democracy in the Middle East.

For the purpose of this study, the terms Arab Middle East and Middle East and North Africa (MENA) -region are used interchangeably, representing the following countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. This paper therefore uses the membership of the Arab League as spatial delimitation, excluding the following five countries that are located further south on the African continent: Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia and Sudan.[16] The Middle East is understood as a historical, social as well as geographical concept. It has

---

[16] 'Arab League – The League of Arab States', http://www.arab.de/arabinfo/league.htm, July 22, 2011, 'World Bank Definition: MENA',

witnessed Islamic conquests and Arabic empires, the Crusades and Western and Mongol invasions. It was under Turkish and then European domination before becoming home to a variety of new nations in the twentieth century including Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. This definition of the area that is being studied provides the spatial delimitation of this dissertation. Temporally, the study focuses on the current state and level of democratization in the early 21st century. However, explaining this requires going back in time, and analyzing events and developments that have affected the current circumstances. Thus, the paper relies on orthodox historical and contemporary analysis. Historically, it will therefore go as far back as the 1970s, the beginning of the third wave of democratization that saw more than five dozen countries throughout Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia undergo some form of democratic transition.[17]

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The aim of this study is to make clear the interplay of external and internal forces that explains the Middle East's democracy deficit as well as the recent push for democratic change. To a certain extent, the difficulty in explaining the source of the Arab world's democracy deficit resides in the complex meaning of the term democracy itself. Therefore, it is crucial to first make clear some of the basic terminology and assumptions of this paper – starting with the terms 'democracy', 'democracy deficit' and 'democratization'.

For the purpose of this paper liberal democracy is defined as a type of regime that secures personal freedom and private property, and governs according to the rule of law through representative government responsive to the people in regular elections.[18] There is, however, wide disagreement among scholars of international relations on the current definition of the term

---

http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/MENAEXT/0,,menuPK:247619~pagePK:146748~piPK:146812~theSitePK:256299,00.html , July 4, 2011

[17] Huntington (1991b), pp.12-14

[18] 'Liberal Democracy and its Limits', http://www.colgate.edu/portaldata/imagegallerywww/2ead5faf-9854-4baa-b99b-2ca2ff42a950/ImageGallery/theme.pdf, July 22, 2011

democracy.[19] Payne argues that the word democracy has become indefinable because it has too many meanings.[20] Whereas, Williamson advocates the importance of Plato's Republic for anyone seeking to understand the enduring challenges facing democratic societies.[21] In the words of Alain Touraine, democracy 'does not reduce human beings to the status of mere citizens' but 'recognizes them as free individuals who also belong to economic or cultural collectivities'.[22] An accurate investigation of the debate surrounding the term democracy would of course require a massive volume. In the context of this study, however, one can explore the term's popular conceptions in order to set the scene for a proper analysis of the Middle East's democracy deficit. Despite the variety of pertinent definitions regarding the term democracy, the most significant aspect for this investigation remains that it is a form of political system in which the ordinary citizen is endowed with the right to influence the course of his government through the process of free elections. Put briefly, "democracy is a system in which incumbents lose elections and leave office when the rules so dictate'.[23] It is a form of government 'in which political freedom is guaranteed and in which members of the democracy have equal, effective input into the making of binding collective decisions[…] it thereby combines the notions of "government by the people" and "government for the people"'.[24] In other words, democracy is a political system whose legitimacy stems from the principle of popular sovereignty. This being that ordinary citizens have the right to govern themselves.

Given this definition of democracy, the notion of democracy deficit must be viewed in terms of a question of legitimacy. Legitimacy is defined as the right to govern based on public consent.[25] In other words, the notion of democracy deficit implies the exclusion of citizens from the political process. It entails a process of decision making from above that does not represent the interests of

---

[19] Dahl et al. (2003), pp 1-55; Touraine (1997)
[20] Payne (2009), p. 609
[21] Williamson (2008)
[22] Touraine (1997), p.16
[23] Przeworski et al. (2000), p.54
[24] Bekkers (2007), pp. 41-42
[25] Coicaud (2002), p. 10

the people and finally, it suggests limited accountability of government leaders. Thus, a democracy deficit insinuates a form of government that does not provide for a minimum of delegation and a maximum of information and transparency.

Political democratization on the other hand, entails 'an expansion of political participation in such a way as to provide citizens with a degree of real and meaningful collective control over public policy'.[26] It is also important to distinguish this notion of democratization from that of political liberalization. Political liberalization in fact, involves 'the expansion of public space through the recognition and protection of civil and political liberties, particularly those bearing upon the ability of citizens to engage in free political discourse and to freely organize in pursuit of common interests'.[27] The distinction is important given that elements of one can exist independently of the other. Political repression can be relaxed without simultaneously increasing political participation. In fact, far from accompanying democratization, such methods of political liberalization can be used to avoid genuine democratic reform. Likewise, governments can restrict political freedom whilst claiming widespread popular participation.[28] Political freedom however, is essential to a functioning democracy. Without political liberty citizens are unable to effectively organize and take part in the decision making process. Moreover, elections are viewed as a crucial part of a democratic system. However, the existence of elections must not be confused with the substance of democratic politics. Elections conducted under 'highly distortional systems of electoral representation or amidst widespread electoral fraud may not in fact provide citizens with any effective say in political decision making'.[29]

In sight of current democratic stirrings in the Middle East, there has been an increase in academic interest in the processes and prospects of democratic transition. This has become apparent in the upsurge of publications and discussions on the subject. In this, while partial case studies abound, there have been relatively few attempts to identify the key issues arising from the study of political change in the Arab world. This project is an attempt to address this deficiency by

---

[26] Brynen, Korany and Noble, eds. (1995), p.3
[27] Ibid, p. 3
[28] Ibid, p.4
[29] Ibid, p.4

paying particular attention to the interplay of international and domestic forces in shaping the course of political change in the Middle East.

The following analysis of the Middle East's democracy deficit rests on the assumption that states and regimes are not isolated entities, but that they exist in an international system that can both undermine as well as support political change. Moreover, the contemporary international system is shaped by the process of globalization that creates a diffusion of democratic values, raising the prospects of regime transition whereby political events in one country trigger effects across international borders. Thus, explanations of domestic political dynamics require reference to forces emanating from an external environment. Nevertheless, despite the growing influence of external forces, their ability to manipulate regimes of sovereign states is limited. Therefore, the paper suggests that it is impossible to analyse the political situation in the Middle East in isolation from domestic actors, institutions and events. In fact, although regime incumbents and their domestic political opponents may be influenced by external forces, political developments in the struggle for state power are largely to be explained in terms of domestic forces and calculations. In the case of the Middle East, this has become particularly apparent during this year's Arab revolts that have occurred in the name of democracy and were triggered by domestic actors.

In order to address the question pertaining to the forces shaping the current state and level of democratization in the Middle East, this paper is divided into three sections. The first section explores the external forces that have played a major role in stalling as well as advancing democratization in the region. In particular, it looks at US foreign policy, which has shaped the contemporary political environment in the Arab world. The second section analyses the domestic forces that explain the region's resistance to democracy, as well as those internal dynamics that have been pushing towards democratization. Finally, the third section looks at recent developments in the Middle East in an attempt to examine the prospects for democratic transition and the changes that have occurred throughout the region. The paper concludes that any examination of democracy in the Middle East must take into account the complexity of this political geography - international

and domestic interaction of forces – as well as the prospects and challenges that face the progress of democratization in the region.

2.   External Influences and Middle East Democratization

2.1 Stability verses Democracy

This part sets out to explore the external forces that have shaped the democracy deficit in the Middle East. In this, the focus is on US foreign policy towards the region and the ways in which it has inhibited political change. US policy has played a major role in shaping the contemporary political environment of the Arab world, in particular because of the US' historical involvement in the Arab-Israeli peace process and the articulation of the global War on Terror in 2001 that centred on a 'forward strategy of freedom' in the Middle East.[30] This involvement translates into the fact that for many years the region has received the bulk of US bilateral foreign aid. In 2008, the share of US foreign assistance consumed by the Middle East amounted to 34%.[31] Moreover, out of the six primary recipients of US foreign aid, four countries are located in the Middle East: Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq.[32] On the other hand, this analysis also shows that to a certain extent, US policies have provoked increased political awareness in Arab countries. Similarly, the chapter demonstrates that globalization as an external force has allowed for the diffusion of democratic values in the Arab world.

Contemporary Western and especially US attitudes toward Arab democratization and international support for authoritarian regimes are a core impediment to democratization. In this, Western strategy in the Middle East has helped maintain the stability of authoritarian regimes by providing material and legitimacy resources. In fact, external actors have long favoured policies of stability over regime change, given that, regardless of the character of the opposition, political

---

[30] 'Remarks by President George W. Bush', http://www.ned.org/george-w-bush/remarks-by-president-george-w-bush-at-the-20th-anniversary, 10 June 2011
[31] Congressional Research Service (2009), 'Foreign Aid: An Introductory Overview of US Programs and Policy', http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/124970.pdf, p. 15, July 22, 2011
[32] Ibid, p. 15, July 22, 2011

change is always accompanied by a period of turmoil and insecurity. This could threaten Western economic and security interests by a disruption of energy supplies, lesser collaboration in the fight against terrorism and migration control. Moreover, the fear of the rule of Islamist groups, understood as 'parties and political organizations that promote social and political reform in accordance with Islamic religious principles that may lead them to oppose US or EU foreign policy'[33], has long provided a rationale for supporting authoritarian regimes.

In their extensive study of Middle East authoritarianism Sean Yom and Mohammad Al-Momani use the case study of Jordan to explore the relationship between international support and domestic regime stability. They find that the cessation of the democratic reform program initiated in Jordan after the 1989 financial crisis is directly linked to mounting levels of foreign assistance provided by the US and its allies.[34] During the 1990s, a wave of civic unrest swept across Jordan, threatening the authority of the ruling monarchy through growing political opposition. For the US and its allies 'the prospect of executive power turnover from the conservative state apparatus to a potentially hostile, Islamist oriented ruling alternative ran counter to long term strategic interests'.[35] In fact, Jordan was to play a crucial role in American political endeavors across the Middle East, particularly with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict. When the monarchy signed the peace treaty with Israel in 1994, the US poured substantial amounts of economic aid and security assistance into Jordan. Thus, regime stability was upheld in order to maintain the peace accords with Israel at the expense of any democratic agenda in Jordan, especially because major democratic groups in the kingdom voiced their opposition to the truce. For the monarchy, external assistance reinforced its fiscal capability and security apparatus, enabling the regime to constrain the opposition without fearing international repercussions. Since 2001, Jordan's collaboration with Washington's War on

---

[33] Sharp (2006), Summary
[34] Yom & Al-Momani (2008), p.40
[35] Ibid, pp.40-41

Terror further increased the amount of economic and military support to the country and weakened prospects for change.[36]

The Jordanian case alone cannot provide for a general causal explanation of the democracy deficit in the MENA. However, it is helpful in that it demonstrates the extent to which foreign forces play a role in shaping the domestic balance of power between the ruling regime and the opposition in Arab states. In fact, external economic and military assistance can strengthen the power of ruling elites and ensure the continuity of the autocratic system.

Prior to September 11, 2001 US policy towards the Middle East viewed authoritarian regimes as a bulwark against Islamist opposition movements that were spreading during the 1990s. Brown and Shahin argue that even unfriendly repressive establishments, for instance Syria's, Libya's and Iraq's, were favoured by the US to Islamist alternatives.[37] Nevertheless, democratization was not completely ignored. During the George H. W. Bush administration, small scale Arab world democracy aid programs were launched. They were designed to encourage accountability, good governance and the rule of law. The underlying principle of these projects was that they would support the market-based economic modernization policies that at the time were the top of the US' agenda in the Middle East. The Clinton's administration's emphasis on democracy promotion later gave rise to various larger projects in Egypt, the West Bank and Gaza, drawing on funds from the massive share of financial aid allocated by the US to these places. These long-term projects aimed to develop parliament, the court system and NGOs. They reflected the general sense that democracy promotion would weaken Islamic fundamentalism and advance economic liberalization. Nonetheless, these projects remained largely superficial, avoiding controversial issues, such as political Islam, that could be perceived as an intrusion into domestic politics and upset friendly regimes.

Paradoxically, countries receiving immense amounts of US aid have succeeded in dissuading democratization initiatives. Since 1975, economic and development assistance to Egypt through the

---

[36] Congressional Research Service (2009), 'Foreign Aid: An Introductory Overview of US Programs and Policy', http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/124970.pdf, pp. 12-15, July 22, 2011
[37] Brown & Shahin (2009),p.18

US Agency for International Development (USAID) amounts to over $28 billion. It is the largest US development assistance program in the Middle East. Additionally, US military aid to Egypt totals over $1.3 billion annually since the wake of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979.[38] However, according to the terms of the bilateral aid relationship, the Egyptian regime had the right to veto all democracy promotion projects, putting democracy initiatives directly under the control of former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak. According to Brown and Shahin, democracy and human rights issues were never placed on the agendas of meetings with Arab leaders prior to September 11.[39] Former director of policy planning at the US Department of State, Richard Haass, asserted that previous administrations have not attributed sufficient priority to democratization and declared that:

> the United States has avoided scrutinizing the internal workings of countries in the interest of ensuring a steady flow of oil; containing Soviet, Iraqi, and Iranian expansionism; addressing issues related to the Arab-Israeli conflict; resisting communism in East Asia; or securing basing rights for the U.S. military […] yielding to what might be called a "democratic exception" in parts of the Muslim world – the United States has missed an opportunity to help these countries adapt to the stresses of a globalizing world.[40]

In this, he claimed that continuing to make this exception in the Arab world was no longer in the interest of the US and that future policies 'will be more actively engaged in supporting democratic trends in the Muslim world than ever before'.[41] Thus, to a certain extent, the attacks of 9/11 triggered a re-orientation of Middle East policy, consigning democracy promotion to the forefront of the debate surrounding the fight against global terrorism. By the same token, Powell announced the creation of the US-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) in 2002 that would provide American support for various democracy promotion programs, encouraging civil society and

---

[38] 'Background Note: Egypt', http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5309.htm, 10 May 2011
[39] Brown & Shahin (2009), p.20
[40] Haass (2003), p.142
[41] Ibid, p.142

political participation. Then, in November 2003 Bush announced a 'new policy' toward the Middle East: 'a forward strategy of freedom'.[42] This new policy included initiatives such as the MEPI and the Broader Middle East and North Africa Partnership Initiative (BMENA) announced in June 2004 at the G8 Summit, both aiming to promote reform in the political, social, cultural and economic sphere of Arab nations. Efforts of democracy promotion were also made on the level of public diplomacy, encouraging bilateral meetings between US officials and their Arab counterparts. Former US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, held a speech at the American University of Cairo in June 2005 declaring that 'for 60 years, the United States pursued stability at the expense of democracy in the Middle East -- and we achieved neither.'[43] The most drastic expression of the Bush administration's interventionist foreign policy was the military invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq in 2003. The core rationale for the war in Iraq was pre-emptive self-defence against presumed weapons of mass destruction and global terrorism. Yet, democratization was also part of the rhetoric surrounding the invasion, given that a democratic Iraq was perceived as an example that would promote reform across the entire region.[44]

However, although the administration's initiatives were hailed as ground-breaking they were very little different from those put forward by the Clinton administration and did not provide a major momentum for political change. In fact, Dalacoura argues that MEPI projects resemble those carried out by USAID, especially because USAID is responsible for the implementation of most of the MEPI programs.[45] There are no indications that MEPI's approach has profoundly altered US democratization strategy in the Middle East, also because the initiative only receives limited funds. The Brookings Institution noted in 2004 that MEPI had received a total of $264 million, of which it had spent just over $103 million.[46] In this, it is dwarfed by US expenditure in Iraq, estimated at $806

---

[42] 'Remarks by President George W. Bush', http://www.ned.org/george-w-bush/remarks-by-president-george-w-bush-at-the-20th-anniversary, 10 June 2011

[43] 'Rice Calls for Middle East Democracy'(2005), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4109902.stm, 10 June 2011

[44] Dalacoura (2005), p.965

[45] Ibid, p. 966

[46] 'The Middle East Partnership Initiative', http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2004/1129middleeast_wittes.aspx, 10 June 2011

billion, and the war on terror generally, which runs into more than one trillion dollars.[47] Besides, MEPI's lack of a coherent strategy for pursuing reform initiatives and meeting its objectives has led to a general failure of gaining solid US government support for its programs.[48] Subsequently, this impedes the program's ability to have a substantial impact on deeply ingrained social issues and uncooperative regimes.

The intervention in Iraq has thus far not produced apparent results on the democracy front. In sight of deep ethnic cleavages dividing Iraqi society and their violent expression that has caused hundreds of thousands civilian casualties, prospects for a stable democracy in Iraq, eight years after the invasion, remain extremely doubtful. Although the country no longer suffers under authoritarian rule, the post-invasion period has been much more difficult than previously anticipated and the war has inflamed anti-American sentiments across the region, 'strengthening the hand of Islamic radicals and complicating the life of pro-Western Arab democrats.'[49]

The United States and Europe assert that pushing for democracy in the Middle East is part of a new security imperative and have introduced a variety of pro-reform policies, but Western governments remain inapt at putting this commitment into practice through efficient policies.

2.2 Democratic Diffusion

To a certain extent however, external efforts of democratization, such as those pursued by the United States during the Bush administration have triggered a debate across the Arab world about the need for political change. Indeed, it has been argued that the Bush administration's public democracy promotion rhetoric has 'shaken the Arab world out of its apathy and forced reform on the agenda in an unprecedented way'- even though this debate is accompanied by criticism of US

---

[47] Belasco (2011), p.1
[48] 'Democracy Promotion Under Obama: Lessons From the Middle East Partnership Initiative' (2009), http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/rc/papers/2009/05_democracy_promotion_wittes/05_democracy_promotion_wittes.pdf, July 22, 2011; and 'A Better Way to Support Middle East Reform'(2005), http://carnegieendowment.org/files/PB33.carothers.FINAL.web.pdf, July 22, 2011
[49] Carothers & Ottaway (2005), p.8

policies in the region.[50] Analysts argue that US emphasis on reform has made it possible for opposition movements in the region to act more boldly. The desirability of political change is also being discussed throughout the Arab media. Especially Arab satellite television channels, such as *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya*, have defined democratic reform as a core Arab issue. *Al Jazeera* sought to give voice to a 'deep Arab frustration with the perceived failures of Arab regimes. In 1999 alone, almost a dozen *Al Jazeera* talk shows criticized the absence of democracy in the Arab world'.[51] In this, Arab media today represents a powerful force encouraging a pluralistic political culture. Similarly, debates in the Middle East about political reform have 'multiplied and taken on a freer, franker character' even if there is still more talk about the imperative for democracy, than action to bring it about.[52] The debate on democracy has also prompted an examination of Islamist movements and their standpoint concerning democratic reform. Responding to the debate initiated by US foreign policy, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood revealed its own political reform initiative in March 2004. They demanded democratic freedoms, the limitation of the sweeping powers of the president, and the suspension of the emergency law.[53]

In May 2002, the publication of the United Nations Development Program's *Arab Human Development Report* enhanced the legitimacy of reform as a pressing pan-Arab issue. The report condemned the deficits of education, good governance, freedom, and women's empowerment and advanced political and economic reform as crucial to solving the multiple difficulties facing the Middle East.[54] The fact that it was drafted by well-respected Arabs and also had the expertise of the United Nations to support it, contributed to the authority of the report, leading Arab governments to establish a committee in the Arab League in order to study its recommendations.

External pressures have pushed certain Arab regimes to initiate democratic reform, albeit in a limited and highly controlled way. Restricted political openings have been introduced in Bahrain,

---

[50] Dalacoura (2005), p. 967
[51] Lynch (2004), pp. 2-3
[52] Carothers & Ottaway (2005), p.8
[53] Essam El-Din (2004)
[54] 'UNDP Releases the First Arab Human Development Report'(2002), http://www.arab-hdr.org/publications/contents/2002/execsum-02e.pdf, 27 June 2011

Qatar, Kuwait, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Algeria and Morocco, at different times and to various degrees, advancing civil rights and allowing for more political participation, mostly through elections. In Qatar for instance, citizens voted for a constitution in 2003 that gave rise to the establishment of a 45 member parliament and in Saudi Arabia the first municipal elections in more than 40 years were held in 2005. Likewise, in 2005, Egypt held its first ever presidential elections and Kuwait introduced women's suffrage. Herein, although hailed by the West, democratization efforts have largely been exploited by Arab governments. Elections have allowed regimes to open political space without changing the status quo and have ultimately ensured the power of ruling elites. However, these limited political reforms have offered Middle Eastern societies a glimpse of what democratic politics might look like and have encouraged awareness in civil society of the question of political change.

In turn, Middle Eastern society's awareness of the need for political change is being amplified by the wider effects of globalization. Globalization has contributed to a shift from tribalism to citizenship as the defining characteristic of the political order in the Middle East. It has given rise to gender politics, challenging traditional conceptions of the role of women in Arab society. Efforts to empower women are bearing fruits for instance in Saudi Arabia where women now 'own more than 20,000 companies and establishments'.[55] Further, the participation of women as political candidates, such as in Kuwait's 2006 parliamentary elections, has inspired women in neighbouring countries, generating a change of attitude that is likely 'to strengthen demands from civil society for a greater political voice for women'.[56] Moreover, new social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, the wider blogosphere and innovations in communication technologies have provided citizens with new vehicles to participate in international debates and mobilize. The region's satellite-based media has also been involved in creating a political culture of engagement and awareness. Television stations such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya have contributed to the creation of a more 'pan-Arab

---

[55] Ministry of Foreign Affairs Saudi Arabia (2007), p. 64
[56] Ehteshami and Wright (2007), p. 917

cultural space in which developments in one country have a more immediate and profound influence on outcomes elsewhere in the region'.[57] The effects of globalization through the growth in information and communications technologies, and in particular internet access, has increasingly exposed the Middle East's young generation, to norms and values which are prone to result in greater political awareness. This type of exposure has fostered a better understanding among Arab society, of political and social practices on an international level. Thus, growing frustration with autocratic systems has the potential of translating into domestic political activism in favour of democratization.

In this, external influences have provided financial and legitimacy resources that have supported autocratic regimes, inhibiting political change. Yet, recent international pressures for democratization combined with the wide reaching effects of globalization have increased political awareness throughout the Middle East providing a momentum for change. Having explored the international environment in which Arab regimes operate, this paper turns to the analysis of the specific domestic politics that have restrained democratization, as well as those internal forces that have pushed towards it.

3. Domestic Forces and the Struggle for Democracy

3.1 The Resilience of Authoritarianism

The primary dependant variable for scholars of Middle Eastern politics has long been authoritarianism. However, in sight of contemporary anti-authoritarian uprisings sweeping across the Middle East, political scientists are forced to rethink their endeavour. Egypt and Tunisia have experienced peaceful political revolutions which will lead to major change, Yemen and Syria are repressing their populations forcefully, Libya is torn between international war and civil war and others like Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are suffocating the democracy movement. Whilst experiments

---

[57] Noland (2005), pp. 24-27

in liberalization, even democratization, are occurring in several countries, others are closing up. The political situation in the region is now far too multifaceted to be explained by a few selected theories. Thus, it is crucial to acknowledge the significant role of the interplay between a variety of external and internal forces that is shaping the politics of the region. This chapter explores the social, economic and political domestic forces that have impeded democratic progress in Arab countries, as well as those that are currently demanding transparent and just government.

Fundamentally democracy is shaped by the historical and cultural context out of which it arises, but the use of the political culture concept in attempting to explain the democracy deficit in the Middle East is controversial because of its frequent abuse. The region has been subjected to blatant overgeneralizations and reductionist stereotyping. This is the case for instance in Patai's well known piece, *The Arab Mind*, which asserts that 'the Arabs are the least willing of nations to subordinate themselves to each other, as they are rude, proud, ambitious, and eager to be the leader'.[58] Similarly, Kedourie describes Arab society as accustomed to 'autocracy and passive obedience, and therefore incapable of upholding the democratic culture necessary for civil society'.[59] Huntington's response is that the Arab and Islamic world more broadly, lacks the core political values that triggered the emergence of representative democracy in Western civilization: 'separation of religious and secular authority, rule of law and social pluralism, parliamentary institutions of representative government, and protection of individual rights and civil liberties as the buffer between citizens and the power of the state'.[60] In this, claims about how Islam is inimical to democracy are insufficient to explain the political situation in the region, given that Islam like other religions is open-ended, subject to interpretation, and widely varying in practice across both the dimensions of time and distance. The topic of this paper is Arab political regimes, and the category 'Muslim' is too broad to be analytically meaningful.

---

[58] Patai (1973), p. 20
[59] Kedourie (1992), p.103
[60] 'The True Clash of Civilization', http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/Inglehart%20Foreign%20Policy.pdf, 10 May 2011

Much of the literature seeking to explain the lack of democracy in the Middle East falls into the structural category. In this, the patriarchal and tribal mentality of Arab society is said to be one of the core factors hindering the development of pluralist values. The continuation of extended kinship ties is said to impede the emergence of a sense of national unity, which is posited as a prerequisite to successful democratization.[61] Similarly, Michael Herb finds that sectarian cleavages in Jordan are reflected in a structuring of electoral districts that prevents large sections of the population from having equitable representation in the legislative body.[62] In Bahrain the royal family limits the powers of the parliament because the country's majority population is Shiite, whilst its royalty is Sunni.

A study from the Centre of European Studies finds that in several Middle Eastern countries, political parties are organised along ethnic and sectarian lines. Therefore, identity politics are more important than 'views on the common good or the well being of state and society'.[63] More importantly, a recurrent theme within Middle Eastern societies is that of clans in power oppressing non-dominant clans and withholding from them the right to socially organize.[64] Communal, religious and ethnic identities remain strong forces in social life, as do patron-client relationships and patterns of patriarchal authority. Thus, they present formidable obstacles to democratization in the Middle East.[65] Yet, although ethnic divisions may explain the lack of democratization in countries such as Iraq, Jordan and Bahrain, the theory fails to explain the long resilience of autocratic governments in countries with more homogenous societies, such as Egypt and Tunisia.

In his instructive article, "Why Are There No Arab Democracies?," Larry Diamond advances a range of factors that have inspired this year's Arab Spring protests. Among them are the:

Arab states themselves, who reinforce one another in their authoritarianism and their techniques of monitoring, rigging, and repression, and who over the decades have turned

---

[61] Posusney & Angrist (2005), p.4
[62] Herb (1999), pp. 212-230
[63] Centre of European Studies (2008), pp.15-16
[64] Ibid, p. 16
[65] Sharabi (1988)

the 22-member Arab League into an unapologetic autocrats' club. Of all the major

regional organizations, the Arab League is the most bereft of democratic norms and

means for promoting or encouraging them. In fact, its charter, which has not been

amended in half a century, lacks any mention of democracy or individual rights.[66]

Eva Bellin argues that the region's true exceptionalism lies in the robustness and overwhelming ability of Arab authoritarian regimes to remain in power. Their willingness and ability to build coercive apparatuses to crush democratic initiatives has smothered the possibility for reform.[67] Authoritarian regimes in the Middle East are characterised by their unrestrained spending on security, creating extremely sophisticated intelligence apparatuses and secret polices.[68] These are used to keep the masses depoliticized through intrusive methods of surveillance, media control and intimidation. In general, the security apparatus is divided into various factions (army, police, intelligence), which each report directly to the ruler. In this, the ruler has the monopoly of control over the security forces and is indispensable to their coordination. Likewise, contact between the state and foreign governments, is limited to the ruling elite, which therefore controls the influx of foreign aid and investment.

Patrimonialism is a crucial factor underlying the resistance to democracy in the Middle East. In this, 'demobilizing the opposition and building a loyal base through selective favouritism and discretionary patronage'[69] is one of the core tactics of authoritarian rulers. Goldstone refers to them as 'sultanistic dictators'[70] and explains that while they may uphold certain democratic practices such as elections, political parties, a national assembly or a constitution, they preside over them by appointing their supporters to key positions. Indeed, much of the wealth amassed by these rulers is used to buy off support and crush opponents. In Egypt for instance, former president Mubarak is

---

[66] Diamond (2010), pp. 101-102
[67] Bellin (2004), pp. 143-144
[68] Diamond (2010), p. 99
[69] Bellin (2004), p. 145
[70] Goldstone (2011), p.9

said to have built up a fortune of between $40 billion and $70 billion, and 39 officials and businessmen close to his son Gamal are claimed to have accumulated more than $1 billion each.[71]

Nevertheless, social repression through the coercive apparatus or patrimonial organisation alone is not what has enabled the extreme longevity of Arab authoritarianism. Instead, what is particularly remarkable is the ability of these regimes to combine authoritarian structures and practices with mechanisms of representation and consultation. In other words, practices of guided pluralism, manipulated elections and selective repression that have occurred in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria and Kuwait are not merely part of a strategy for regime survival, but represent a type of liberalized autocratic system 'whose institutions, rule, and logic defy any linear model of democratization'.[72] In times of social pressures from within their societies or from the outside, Arab rulers have proved particularly efficient at allowing for temporary openings in civic activity and improvements in human rights. However, as soon as political opposition appears, the regime limits political space and returns to methods of repression. In this, Middle Eastern autocrats have become proficient in containing, disarming and exploiting democratic practices.

There is an economic basis explaining this ability of Arab regimes to contain democratic pressures, namely that of the rentier state. A rentier state is understood as one that receives on a regular basis 'substantial amounts of external economic rent'.[73] In other words, a rentier state's economy depends on unearned income derived from the export of natural resources abroad. In the case of the Middle East this includes countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Qatar, Iran, Libya, Sudan, Yemen and Algeria. All of which derive their income primarily from the export of oil and gas. Together, these states account for 65 percent of the world's proven oil reserves and 45 percent of natural gas reserves.[74]

---

[71] Ibid, p. 11
[72] Brumberg (2002), p. 56
[73] Mahdavy (1970), p. 428
[74] 'Sound Policies Soften Crisis Impact on Middle East', http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2009/car101109a.htm, 20 March 2011

The theory of the rentier state contends that authoritarianism prevails in countries where profits from natural resource exports replace taxes in government income. In fact, the public is not involved in the creation of wealth in a rentier state, because wealth is almost entirely generated by oil revenues. Thus, the theory is often summed up in Samuel Huntington's aphorism '"no taxation without representation" was a political demand; "no representation without taxation" is a political reality'.[75] Given that external rent liberates states from the need to extract income from their domestic economies, the result is a heavily centralized state in which government leaders buy off political dissent. The relationship between oil and politics is analysed by Ross who uses cross-national data from 113 states between 1971 and 1997 to find that 'the oil-impedes-democracy claim is both valid and statistically robust [...] oil does hurt democracy'.[76] It is hereby argued that resource-rich states in the Middle East are financially autonomous granting them immunity from democratic pressures. These states use low tax rates and patronage to repress popular movements. Likewise, oil wealth enables rentier governments to strengthen their internal security apparatuses and hence keep social factions in check. Consequently, Middle East states that base their economic growth on the export of oil and other natural resources are unlikely to bring about the social and cultural transformations that tend to push towards democratic government.

However, explaining the democracy deficit in the Middle East goes well beyond the oil factor. The oil-impedes-democracy claim does not explain the lack of democratization in resource-poor countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Syria and Jordan. In these countries instead, exogenous rents exists for strategic reasons in the form of foreign aid. This dynamic shapes domestic politics in the region in similar ways as rent derived from the export of oil and gas. Strategic rent is provided by Western governments in order to guarantee the steady flow of oil and gas supplies, secure cooperation in the global fight against terrorism, encourage peaceful relations with Israel and control migration. In other words, large amounts of financial aid are poured into countries of the Middle East to ensure security, stability and cooperation. In the case of Egypt for instance, US

---

[75] Huntington (1991), p. 65
[76] Ross (2001a), pp. 356-357

development assistance to the country has amounted to $28 billion since 1975.[77] In Jordan, US economic and military assistance annually amounts to around $650 million since 2001.[78] Given that these countries do not dispose of transparent democratic institutions to effectively administer foreign aid, the money is used to maintain extensive security apparatuses that repress potential opposition to authoritarian regimes. Thus, similar to oil and gas, foreign aid acts as strategic rent making possible 'the regime's key political strategy of spending massively on public jobs without imposing steep taxes'.[79] The aid is absorbed by government leaders and 'financially enables the maintenance of illegitimate institutions of internal surveillance and repression, on which autocratic regimes heavily rely'.[80]

The predicaments of democracy in the Arab world are further exacerbated by the region's soft spot for militarism, which manifests in old and new unresolved regional and internal conflicts. Among the deep-rooted persistent problems are lingering conflicts such as the Arab-Israeli, Iraqi-Iranian, Libyan-Chadian, Lebanese, Sudanese, Somali, Saharan conflicts. Some of which have broken out into armed conflicts on and off for decades. According to the UN Institute for Disarmament Research, the Middle East is a region of high military spending relative to gross domestic product (GDP) and has 'correspondingly high levels of arms imports'.[81] Military spending in the area increased by 34 percent over the period 1999-2008 and '7 of the 10 countries with the highest military burdens in 2007 were Middle Eastern'.[82] The area, which makes up for around 3 percent of the world's population, accounted for 21 percent of world imports of major conventional weapons between 2004 and 2008.[83]

Relevant to our main concern – the Middle East's democracy deficit- is the dismal presence of conflict within the Arab world. Goldstone contends that war hardens regimes and impedes

---

[77] Diamond (2010), p. 101
[78] Ibid, p. 101
[79] Yom (2009), p. 163
[80] Perlini (2011), p.3
[81] Arms Transfers to the Middle East', http://www.unidir.org/pdf/activites/pdf3-act465.pdf, 10 May 2011
[82] Ibid
[83] Ibid

democracy.[84] Noland's causal analysis finds that greater militarization is associated with less democracy and Gause argues that internal and external conflict is used to enable undemocratic rule:

> *Wars tend to concentrate power in the hands of the executive…Wars make it easier to stigmatize as treasonous, and then suppress, opposition forces. War preparation leads to greater state control over the economy, limiting the power and autonomy of private sector economic actors who might press for democratic reform. War preparation requires building a coercive apparatus that then can be used internally.[85]*

Likewise, Bellin asserts that unrelenting internal and external conflict provides rhetorical legitimization for coercive regimes and allows for the maintenance of prolonged states of emergency that suppress civil liberties in many MENA countries.[86] Regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, Anderson suggests that the 'prospects for democracy seem to increase in direct proportion to the distance of a country from the Arab-Israeli and Persian Gulf arenas'.[87] All of these conflicts are costly in material and human terms. The Middle East region is the principal buyer and consumer of lethal arms in the Third World, spending an average of 100 billion annually over the last two decades, without settling most of the above mentioned conflicts.[88]

Along with militarism the democracy deficit in the Middle East can be explained by the fragile character of civil society in the region. Saad Eddin Ibrahim defines civil society as an 'organized collective participation in the public space between individuals and the state'.[89] It includes non-state actors, non-governmental organizations as well as political parties, trade unions, professional associations and other interest groups, which serve as intermediaries between the individual and the state. The connection between civil society and democratization rests in that democracy is intended to enable government through peaceful organization of competing groups

---

[84] Goldstone (2011), p. 16
[85] Gause (1995), p. 286
[86] Bellin (2004), p. 157
[87] Anderson (2001), p. 56
[88] 'Defense Spending in Middle East expected to surpass $100 billion by 2014', http://www.frost.com/prod/servlet/press-release.pag?docid=189276179, July 22, 2011
[89] Ibrahim (1995), p. 29

and conflicting interests. Democracy is ultimately a question of checks and balances, as Mehran Kamrava explains democracy is an issue of 'balance between state and society […] it comes about when a state's powers are held in check over time by procedures and by institutional mechanisms grounded in and supported by society'.[90]Herein, it is mainly through civil society that citizens 'protect their rights as individuals, force policy makers to accommodate their interests, and limit abuses of state authority'. [91] Civil society brings about a culture of bargaining, providing future leaders with the skills to articulate ideas, form coalitions and govern. Therefore, a strong civil society gives rise to a high level of institutionalized social pluralism. However, in the Middle East autocratic regimes have reached bargains with certain social and economic actors in their societies. This confers them a sort of superficial legitimacy that pacifies potentially oppositional actors and enables the regime's survival. Moreover, Arab dictators have successfully silenced civil society in their countries by weakening the outreach of the news media, stifling intellectual inquiry, regulating the arts and banning political parties. In Egypt for instance, renowned human rights and democracy activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim was accused of defaming Egypt and sentenced to two years of prison in 2008.

This chronic weakness of civil society insinuates that viable Arab democracies, or leaders who could govern them, will have difficulty emerging anytime soon. In this, Timur Kuran claims that the more likely immediate outcome of current uprisings in the Middle East is a new set of dictators or single-party regimes.[92] Nevertheless, it is worth to mention that within the last decade there has been an 'unprecedented increase of various civil society organizations and of associational life in the Middle East'.[93] Yet, although civil society may have developed in the region, it has hitherto failed to provide a long term shift in the balance of power, away from the state and in favour of society.

---

[90] Kamrava (2007), p. 208

[91] 'The Weak State of Arab democracy', http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/29/opinion/29kuran.html, 10 May 2011

[92] Kuran (2011), http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/29/opinion/29kuran.html?_r=1&ref=todayspaper, July 22, 2011

[93] Ibid (2007), p. 211

3.2 The Collapse of the Authoritarian Bargain

However, despite the robust character of authoritarianism in the Arab world and its ability to impede democratic progress, the collapse of the authoritarian bargain has provided for an impetus for political change. In fact, dictatorial regimes are said to rely on an 'authoritarian bargain', that is 'an implicit arrangement between ruling elites and citizens whereby citizens relinquish political influence in exchange for public spending'.[94] It implies a link between redistributive policies and political control. Analyses of these bargains have been evoked in comparative politics to explain the stability or breakdown of various types of non-democratic regimes. In their study of the logic of the 'authoritarian bargain', Resai Olofsgard and Yousef find that authoritarian regimes choose the 'lest-cost bundle of economic benefits and political openness necessary to sustain their rulership and secure public support.'[95] These bargains are often fed by the existence of external rents that allow autocratic regimes to maintain generous welfare and public-employment programs, whilst retaining firm control over political life.[96]

The case of Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s under the regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser, best illustrates this idea of an authoritarian bargain. Nasser's populist as well as authoritarian government made a ruling bargain with labour and the middle class, whereby political parties were banned and civic organisations and trade unions were put under direct control of the regime. In return, the state guaranteed the provision of social and welfare packages in the form of 'subsidies for food, government employment, energy, housing, and transportation as well as free education and health care'.[97] In the 1990s however, unsustainable levels of external debt brought about an economic crisis that forced Hosni Mubarak's regime to adopt the World Bank's economic reform program. In accordance with neo-liberal principles, social benefits were cut; state-owned enterprises were privatized, the long-time guarantee of state employment for university graduates was suspended; trade was liberalized; and subsidies for various commodities were put off. In addition,

---

[94] Desai, Olofsgard & Yousef (2009), p. 93
[95] Ibid, p. 117
[96] Ibid
[97] Shehata (2011), p. 26

public spending on education, health care, housing and transportation declined, deteriorating the quality of the services. As a result, wealth was concentrated in the hands of the few, while the majority of the Egyptian population became increasingly marginalized.

Meanwhile, as the cost of social benefits and other programs used by the regime to appease its citizens inflated, keeping the masses depoliticized became ever more difficult. As the economy expanded and education spread in countries of the Middle East, the number of people with higher aspirations and growing concern about intrusive methods of police surveillance increased. The population grew rapidly and inequality and unemployment rose. Urbanizing and expanding populations suffered from food prices that rose by 32 percent in 2010 alone, while wages and opportunities have remained low.[98] Yet, as Goldstone explains, revolutions are not simply fuelled by a lack of growth or rising prices, instead they arise from the 'persistence of widespread and unrelieved poverty amid increasingly extravagant wealth'.[99] High levels of unemployment have contributed to regional discontent, stemming partly from the major youth bulge in the Middle East.

It is currently estimated that around 30 percent of the population living in the MENA region is aged between 15 and 24.[100] This percentage ranges from 38 percent in Bahrain and Tunisia to over 50 percent in Yemen. Additionally, the overall population of the region is growing at approximately 2 percent a year, which is higher than the world average. Thus, the sharp increase in the share of 15-to-24 year olds in the total population, referred to as the 'youth bulge', combined with the rapid expansion of the total population, has resulted in the most acute increase in the number of youth in the region's history. A great number of these young people have been able to attend university. According to Goldstone, college enrolment has soared across the region in recent decades, 'more than tripling in Tunisia quadrupling in Egypt, and expanding tenfold in Libya'.[101] However, the numbers of students acquiring education has not translated into higher rates of

---

[98] 'The price of food is at the heart of this wave of revolutions', http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/the-price-of-food-is-at-the-heart-of-this-wave-of-revolutions-2226896.html , July 4, 2011

[99] Goldstone (2011), p. 12

[100] 'Youth in MENA', http://www.prb.org/pdf07/youthinMENA.pdf, July 4, 2011

[101] Goldstone (2011), p. 12

employment and wages. In Egypt, 'college graduates are ten times as likely to have no job as those with only an elementary school education'.[102] In the Middle East, regional youth unemployment hit 26 percent in 2005, representing twice the global average.[103] This is partly due to the fact that educational systems in the region are set to preparing students to serve in the public sector, which used to be the principal employer of workforce entrants in most MENA economies, but is no longer able to secure this role. Studies estimate that MENA's labour force will increase by nearly 80 percent between 2000 and 2020.[104] The inability of the region's regimes to cope with this wave of new entrants, combined with the fact that about 23 percent of the 300 million people in the Middle East and North Africa live on less than $2 a day, is one of the major reasons for the recent push towards democratization.[105]

Overall, the domestic perspective demonstrates that a variety of factors such as ethnic and sectarian divisions, repression through the coercive apparatus, patrimonial organization, practices of liberalized autocracy, rentier economics, militarism and a weak civil society, explain the current level of non-democratization in the Middle East. The core argument being that the democracy deficit in these states is largely caused by the unfair manner in which power and wealth are allocated throughout the polity, allowing the regime to actively suppress its opposition. Nevertheless, the collapse of the authoritarian bargain and the tremendous changes in the region's demographics have provided for a relentless push towards democratic change.

The question arising from this investigation of the Middle East's long-standing political stagnation is whether democracy actually represents a primary value for the people of the region. The Arab world has been plagued by long-lasting external and internal conflicts that threaten social security and stability. Most importantly, the Israel-Palestine conflict that has endured for over half a century, embroiling the Middle East in six major wars, costing tens of thousands of Arab and Israeli

---

[102] Ibid, pp.12-13.
[103] ILO (2006), p. 4
[104] Youth in MENA', http://www.prb.org/pdf07/youthinMENA.pdf, July 4, 2011
[105] 'World Bank Definition: MENA',
http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/MENAEXT/0,,menuPK:247619~pagePK:146748~piPK:146812~theSitePK:256299,00.html , July 4, 2011

lives, diverting financial and energy resources from productive ventures to the purchase of weaponry, and finally, significantly impeding regional cooperation.[106] The conflict has left the Middle East with the burden of sheltering Palestinian refugees, the world's largest and longest-standing refugee community in the world. In addition, the recent displacement of the Iraqi people after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 has triggered the worst humanitarian crisis since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. In Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, Palestinian and Iraqi refugees are creating an almost insurmountable social and economic problem, fuelling regional tensions. Moreover, the region is geographically surrounded by the dangers posed by nuclear and biochemical weapons proliferation taking place in Israel, Iran and Pakistan and pursued intermittently in Libya, Syria and Iraq. From an economic perspective the unemployment rate in the Middle East has been recorded the highest in the world, with populations struggling daily for basic social and economic survival. [107] Coupled with perceived global threats to Arab culture and identity since the articulation of the Bush administration's War on Terror, these lingering problems have long prevented the emergence of a solid opposition movement demanding just and accountable government.

However, the democracy deficit in the Middle East has taken a new turn. Since December 2010, a revolutionary wave of demonstrations is sweeping across the region with hundreds of thousands of people marching the streets, demanding legitimate government and the resignation of autocratic leaders. Known as the 'Arab Spring' or 'Arab Awakening', it was sparked by demonstrations in Tunisia following the self-immolation of jobless graduate Mohamed Bouazizi in protest of police corruption.[108] The success of the Tunisian revolution subsequently triggered a wave of protests in Algeria, Jordan, Egypt, Libya and Yemen and then spread to Oman, Morocco, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria and Kuwait. The protests led to the overthrow of Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali who had been in power for over 20 years, and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak

---

[106] Garnham (1995), pp. xiv-xv
[107] 'PPI Trade Facts',
http://www.ppionline.org/ppi_ci.cfm?knlgAreaID=108&subsecID=900003&contentID=254026, 20 March 2011
[108] 'Arab Spring: An Interactive Timeline of Middle East Protests', (June 2011)
http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline, 27 June 2011

who resigned after 18 days of mass demonstrations, ending his 30-year long presidency. In Libya, Muammar al-Gaddafi refused to surrender his powers causing a civil war between regime supporters and rebels, and most importantly a foreign intervention by NATO forces. In Syria, Yemen and Bahrain, governments have countered protests with violent repression and military raids causing a great number of civilian casualties.[109] These recent revolts suggest that people in the Middle East have begun to view their problems of justice, security and identity as linked to the lack of democracy in the region.[110] Pro-reform grass roots movements have manifested themselves, publicly criticising the autocracies in place.[111] The combination of demographics and unemployment is a central motivation for domestic protests. For instance, n Saudi Arabia one person out of three was under the age of 14 in 2007, and in Egypt 60% of the population was between 18-30 years of age in 2008. [112] Therefore, economies in the region will most likely be unable to cope with the huge influx of people expected to enter the labour market in the coming years and unemployment will become an even more pressing issue. This year's revolts in Tunisia, Egypt,, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan and Libya, together with protests in Morocco, Algeria, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Syria indicate that Arab societies are willing and able to express, and in some cases peacefully put through, their demands for change, such as in Egypt and Tunisia. Herein, the balance of power between state and society is shifting as popular participation in politics increases and the power of the police state diminishes.

It is important to keep in mind that the Arab Spring is not an ideological revolution. Instead people are demanding respectful and accountable government, plunging into a pluralistic discourse that has engaged whole populations. Protesters are demanding respect from their governments and the acknowledgement of their rights as citizens, as well as a form of government that has

---

[109] 'Syria: Casualties mount in Baniyas after protesters call for Assad regime to fall' (April 2011), http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2011/04/syria-baniyas-security-arms-protests-injured-killed.html, 28 June 2011; see also 'Bahrain's National Dialogue and the Ever-Deepening Sectarian Divide', (June 2011), http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/06/29/bahrain-s-national-dialogue-and-ever-deepening-sectarian-divide/mxw, 4 July 2011
[110] Perlini (2011), p. 6; and Brown & Shahin (2009), pp. 1-3
[111] Brown & Shahin (2009), pp. 3-4
[112] Ehteshami & Wright (2007), p. 916; and 'Arab Republic of Egypt', http://www.naseej-cyd.org/files/Egypt_Profile_en.pdf, 20 March 2011

responsibilities towards its citizens. It is ideological only in the sense that this generation of people believes that governments are there to serve them, but they are not swept up in ideological movements of any kind.

4. Democracy in the Middle East: Prospects and Challenges

4.1 The Arab Spring: Challenges Ahead

Given the difficult history of democratization in the region, what are the prospects for successful political change in the countries that have ousted their regimes? The aim of this chapter is to identify the future challenges that will shape the level of democratization in the region, focusing particularly on the diverse character of Arab states and the different outcomes they will produce. Further, the section looks at the issue of the military's crucial role during the transition period, as well as the principle developments that have already changed the way in which we think about democracy in the Arab world, namely a new kind of pan-Arabism and a new generation of leaders.

The study of the current state of democracy in the Middle East highlights that generalisations about the region are difficult because every autocratic regime is different. Similarly, the protests in the region are extremely diverse and they are likely to result in completely different outcomes. In this, while there is reasonable optimism about a transition to democratic government in Tunisia and Egypt, that is not the case in Libya and Syria for instance.

Certain political analysts highlight the fact that for the moment, the most organised groups in Arab societies are on one hand, the army, various other factions of the security apparatuses and Islamist entities on the other. According to the President of the Council on Foreign Relations, Richard Haass, secular liberal parties are mostly weak and divided, and it is not likely that they will manage to prevail in any political competition in the near term: 'Facebook and Twitter matter but not enough'.[113] The difficulty lies in the fact that these countries have to completely rethink their political systems. Their constitutions need to be rewritten and checks and balances must be created.

---

[113] Haass (2011)

Herein, there is an argument to be made that political instability in the Middle East will allow disruptive influences to gain power, impeding the emergence of a stable order. According to former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence, Michael Doran, the porous character of Arab politics will provide hostile transnational networks such as al Qaeda, with new fields to plough.[114] Western governments have long argued that democracy in the region would inevitably allow Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood to take power. The Brotherhood is said to be the most organised opposition party in Egypt, because it has been active since several decades in contrast to other groups. On the other hand, in face of the regime's collapse, for which it was not prepared, and the rise of reformist groups, the role of the Brotherhood seems less clear, fuelling the generational cleavage between its members.[115] In this, the influence of the Brotherhood should not be overestimated as it is merely one of many groups demanding democracy and human rights.

Meanwhile, conservatives, populists, Islamists, and modernizing reformers are fiercely vying for power in Tunisia, Egypt, and possibly Libya, meaning that those countries will likely face extensive periods of abrupt government turnovers and policy reversals.[116] Most importantly, countries that have experienced democratic revolutions will have to grapple with establishing political institutions such as constitutions, parties and electoral systems. Libya will have the even more difficult task of building a civil society after a civil war. Egypt specifically will struggle with the legacy of military rule, given that the army is deeply interwoven into domestic politics and economics. Tunisia will have to ameliorate the relationship between its privileged urban areas and its destitute rural hinterlands.

Peaceful transition to effective democratic government is therefore not a given. In 2005, the Cedar revolution ended three decades of Syrian military occupation in Lebanon and brought a new Western-backed anti-Syrian government into power, giving hope for a complete break with the past. Yet, six years later, Lebanon's chronic predicaments persist: 'sectarianism, corruption, the insecurity

---

[114] Doran (2011), p. 19
[115] Anderson, Lisa (2011) 'Arab World Political Unrest', http://www.c-spanarchives.org/program/WorldUp&showFullAbstract=1, July 4, 2011
[116] Goldstone (2011), p. 15-16

brought by a weak central state, foreign meddling and armed party militias'.[117] Although the case of Lebanon does not necessarily provide for predictions on the outcomes of this year's Arab revolts, it does highlight that recent events might not automatically result in successful democratization. Fact is that after two generations of political stagnation, the Middle East faces many challenges and the period of democratic transition might take a long time. As Goldstone phrases it: 'after the post-revolutionary honeymoon period ends, divisions within the opposition start to surface'.[118] During the transition, essential debates over the type of government, whether presidential or parliamentary; taxation, state spending or the role of the military, will come onto the agenda and increasingly divide reformers competing for power in Tunisia and Egypt.

4.2 The Role of the Army in the Transition Period

Democratic stirrings across the Arab world have highlighted the pivotal role of the military in shaping the outcome of popular protests. In Egypt, the military refused to shoot its own people and assumed a rather neutral role during the protests. Conversely, the Syrian army has proven loyal to the regime, brutally repressing pro-democracy demonstrations. The reason for these increasingly different outcomes lies in the differentiation between, on one hand, the army as an extension of the state, and on the other, the army as an extension of the regime. In the study of international relations, a *regime* is known as the 'set of rules, cultural or social norms that regulate the operations of government and its interactions with society, including how its incumbents are selected'.[119] In this, regimes are designed to create and regulate the government of a modern state. According to Max Weber, a political unit is a state, 'if and insofar as its administrative staff successfully upholds a claim on the *monopoly* of the *legitimate* use of violence in the enforcement of its order'.[120] In countries where the state is strong, such as Egypt and Tunisia, the militaries are loyal not to the

---

[117] 'Revolution Spinning in the Wind'(2011), http://www.economist.com/node/18958237?story_id=18958237, July 22, 2011
[118] Goldstone (2011), p. 14
[119] Anderson (2011), http://www.scribd.com/doc/60577554/Lisa-Anderson-%E2%80%94-Democracy-Authoritarianism-and-Regime-Change-in-the-Arab-World , July 2011
[120] Weber (1964), p.154

regime but to the state itself, because affiliation to the state is extensive and clear cut. However, in countries where the identity of the regime is so closely related to the identity of the state, and where efforts to remove the regime are interpreted as a threat to the state itself, the military tends to be loyal to the regime and not to the state. In this case, the military has more to lose should the regime fall; hence it is likely to violently crackdown opposition to the regime, as is the current case in Syria. In this, in Egypt the military has acted as a function of the state, whereas in Syria it has acted as an extension of the regime. In Tunisia the army was willing to defect because former president Ben Ali used the police as an extension of the regime, and the army strongly resented the role of the police. Moreover, in countries where the state is weak and does not enjoy the monopoly of violence, regime change causes state collapse. In Libya, regime failure has generated a collapse of the state apparatus, fuelling political opportunism and causing a division within the army between loyalists to Qaddafi's regime and supporters of the popular will.[121]

Meanwhile, the role of the army in the post-revolutionary and transition period is already apparent in Egypt where the military has been ruling the country since Mubarak's ousting. The current vice-president, prime minister and defence chief are led by the armed forces. Half of the cabinet members are from the military and the country is still ruled by martial law and military courts. In this, the army is still in firm control of the country and in a position to dictate the terms of the transition to democracy.[122] As of this writing, thousands of Egyptians have once more gathered in the streets of Cairo to protest against the military's slow process of implementing reforms. Parliamentary elections have been scheduled for October 2011 and it still remains to be seen whether the army will surrender its powers.

---

[121] Revolution Spinning in the Wind'(2011), http://www.economist.com/node/18958237?story_id=18958237, July 22, 2011
[122] Zakaria (2011), http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/06/AR2011020603398.html, July 22, 2011

4.3 What has changed?

The majority of scholars of Middle Eastern politics did not foresee revolts that overthrew two Arab leaders at the beginning of the year and are still threatening several others. The region's demographic, economic and political issues were well known, but academics were mostly preoccupied with explaining the apparently exceptional persistence of authoritarianism in the Arab world. Until recently, certain Middle East specialists advocated support for Arab authoritarian allies, at the expense of democracy promotion, because they embodied stable bets for the future. These scholars approached the prospect of full-fledged democratic change with great scepticism, given the seemingly unshakeable character of the region's authoritarianism. Today, these scholars admit that they were 'spectacularly wrong'.[123] Academics were not able to predict the different ways in which various armies would react in face of peaceful popular protests, and the widespread assumption that Arab militaries and security apparatuses would never split with their heads of state was shattered by the events in Egypt and Tunisia. Similarly, Gregory Gause argues that the economic foundations of authoritarianism were misinterpreted by academics. It was widely assumed that the large-scale Washington consensus-style economic reforms introduced over the past two decades in Cairo and Tunis would provide new bases of support for dictators. Instead, efforts to promote foreign investment and incentives to stimulate the private-sector created a new class of wealthy entrepreneurs that longed for a just and transparent government. In fact, the face of the Egyptian revolution, Wael Ghonim, was an executive for Google Middle East and North Africa, who decided to risk his career and life to create the 'We are all Khaled Said' Facebook page, which helped spark the revolution. In this, academics missed the destabilizing consequences and pivotal role that poorly implemented liberal economic policies could play within Arab societies.

The common political and cross-border appeal of Arab identity shared by citizens living in twenty different countries was also overlooked. Soon after a fruit vendor set himself on fire in protest of police corruption in Tunisia, the entire Arab world was overcome by revolts in the name of

---

[123] Gause (2011), p.82

democracy demonstrating a profound pan-Arabism. In fact, when the Tunisians and the Egyptians overthrew their corrupt governments, they gave hope to other nations that the same could happen in their countries. These protests have provoked a new pan-Arabism, that of a younger generation that opposes a common enemy in the Arab world, namely corrupt domestic regimes that have grown out of touch with their societies. Thus, it has become increasingly difficult to approach countries in the Middle East individually, given that events in one country have the potential to trigger effects in neighbouring states.

In sight of these new developments, the international arena can and should act in order to contribute to the creation of effective democratic transitions in countries that are already moving towards regime change, such as Egypt and Tunisia. The international community should engage in safeguarding independent and well-financed private organizations in the Middle East that are essential to the success of democratic transitions. Indeed, 'without strong private players willing and able to resist undemocratic forces, nascent Arab democracies could easily slip back into authoritarianism'.[124] Genuine vocal support for democratization should be expressed, including the readiness to accept all groups that comply with democratic rules. The post-revolution period should be used to teach reformers about democratic practices and upon request, to assist them in building their institutions. In providing assistance Western nations and particularly the United States must consider their lack of credibility in these countries, given their history of support for autocratic regimes. In this, efforts to back certain political groups or influence elections will most likely be received with suspicion. Likewise, financial aid, such as that proposed by the Obama administration that includes up to $1 billion in debt relief and another $1 billion in loan guarantees, is useful in order to provide for an effective redistribution of wealth within Arab societies and a stimulus package for democratic institution building.[125] However, these types of economic measures must be carefully implemented, given that pouring money into these countries before they have built an

---

[124] Kuran (2011), http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/29/opinion/29kuran.html?pagewanted=all, July 22, 2011
[125]Stone (2011), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/05/18/obama-middle-east-speech-billions-aid_n_863927.html, July 22, 2011

effective and accountable democratic government will likely encourage corruption and undermine the transition to democracy. Moreover, the communal and pan-Arab character of current Arab upheavals demonstrates that Middle East studies can no longer be approached on a case-by-case basis. The extent of the Arab Spring has shown that events in one Arab state can shape others in powerful ways. Therefore, the international community can no longer choose to support democracy in countries like Egypt and Tunisia, while 'standing by as other allies, such as Bahrain, crush peaceful democratic protests'.[126]

It is useful to bear in mind that Arab revolts were not sparked by policy decisions in Washington or other foreign capitals, but that they are the product of domestic social, economic and political dynamics. Therefore, as paradigms collapse and theories are challenged by contemporary events in the Middle East, academics as well as policy makers would do well to approach the region with great modesty about their ability to manipulate its future.

5. Conclusion

The above discussion highlights that the contemporary weak state of democratization in the Middle East is as much a result of international influences as of domestic forces and calculations. For decades, external and particularly US policies, have sought regime stability instead of democratic reform in the Arab world. The aim of these policies has been to assure the unconstrained flow of vital energy supplies as well as to form alliances using the Middle East's strategic geopolitical situation for military and trade purposes. Herein, the existence of exogenous rents derived from the export of natural resources and large amounts of foreign financial assistance has enabled government elites in the Middle East to become autonomous from their societies and has contributed to the fiscal health of some countries' security and intelligence apparatuses. This study demonstrates that authoritarian regimes in the region have proved particularly efficient at distributing foreign revenues in a manner that permits the concentration of power in the hands of a

---

[126] Gause (2011), p. 89

small group of elites. Meanwhile, the elites have focused on expanding and maintaining large coercive security and intelligence apparatuses in order to preserve their authority and turn opposition to the regime largely impossible. As a result, civil society in the Middle East has suffered from highly intrusive and violent intelligence bodies and has long been unable to organize and express its demands for political representation and just government. However, the increasing inability of Arab regimes to provide for basic services and their indifference to widespread unemployment and poverty has caused profound frustration within Arab societies, providing the impetus for this year's revolutions. In addition, international pressures for democratization, largely motivated by Western security interests, have initiated a few reforms throughout the Middle East since 2001. These have over the years presented Arab societies with an experience of what democratic government might entail, as well as an understanding of the practices of political participation and representation. Similarly, globalization has offered civil society greater means to inform itself and mobilise.

What comes to light when studying the progress of democratization in the Middle East is that the contemporary political geography of the region is far too multifaceted to be explained by a few selected theories. As of this writing, the return of people power in the Arab world has surprised the vast majority of policy makers and academics. Although it was apparent that Arab regimes were profoundly unpopular among their societies and that they faced serious demographic, economic and political problems, nobody was able to predict the Arab Spring. This year's revolts draw attention to fact that there is at least as much continuity as change in Middle East politics. They highlight the popularity of the concept of democracy in the Middle East and invalidate the idea of a passive Arab society that accepts authoritarian rule. However, an overthrow of the undemocratic regime in place will not be sufficient to lead to successful political change. Revolutions are merely the beginning of a lengthy progress and it will take years for stable regimes to emerge. Therefore, what is essential in order to bring about democracy in the Middle East is a long term shift in the balance of power, away from the state and in favour of society. In the words of Mehran Kamrava it requires the 'existence of

[41]

competing groups scattered throughout the polity, both within the institutions of the state and the strata of society, among whom a consensus emerges regarding the mutually beneficial nature of democracy'.[127]For the time being, the young activists of each country who have been sharing ideas and tactics across borders are confronted with different challenges. From the long shadow of military rule in Egypt, to the wide disparities between Tunisia's rural areas and its sullen hinterlands, and Libya's wrecked state, this year's Arab uprising will likely result in a variety of different outcomes. For such countries as Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates, were protests have either been brutally cracked down or swiftly contained, true democracy remains a distant target.

This paper has revealed that any examination of the state of democracy in the Middle East must take into account the complexity of the region's political situation, namely the afore mentioned international and domestic interaction of forces. In sight of this year's popular revolutions, the prospects of successful democratic transitions in the Arab world must equally be understood in the context of an interaction of external and internal forces. In other words, although current protests were motivated by domestic forces and events, they will be influenced by the international political environment that surrounds them. In this, the international arena and especially such countries as the United States that have been particularly implicated in Middle Eastern politics, can and should cease this opportunity of change in order to contribute to effective democratic transitions and stimulate democratic progress in countries that are still stagnating. External governments should actively express genuine support for democratization, and should be ready to accept all groups that act in accordance to democratic rules. The post-revolutionary period in Tunisia and Egypt particularly, should be used to teach reformers about democratic practices and upon request, to assist them in building their institutions.

Despite the obstacles, there is reason for optimism regarding the prospects of genuine democratization in the Middle East. The popular unrests of the 1980s that had forced several

---

[127] Kamrava (2007), p. 208

regimes to allow for more political transparency have been followed by a wave of unprecedented protests sweeping the entire region this year and successfully ridding the Arab world from two of its most resilient dictators. The demand for transparent and just government will undoubtedly remain a central part of political life in Arab society. In the same way, the steady diffusion of democratic values from other parts of the world will persist. As noted by Zacek, "there is a 'contagion' of democratic development: events in some countries clearly impact on neighbouring ones".[128] In this, although today's experiments with democratization do not indicate a complete break with the past and an effective transition to more transparent government, a profound desire for more accountable and just government will remain across Arab societies. Many of the difficulties facing democratization in Arab countries are similar to those faced by other parts of the world. There is therefore no reason to assume that these obstacles will prove insurmountable in the Middle East. In this, while there will inevitably be setbacks on the path to democracy, Arab governments will slowly be obliged to be more accountable to their citizens. Thus, one important set of questions, that arises when assessing the progress of democratization in a region that has historically denied its citizens political participation, pertains to the sort of government that will emerge from true political accountability. Will the norms and structures of democratic systems in the Middle East be similar to those associated with the West, or will a different kind of democracy emerge, perhaps one that is particularly Arab or Islamic? What models of governance will be used, and what broad domestic and foreign policy goals will be expressed? Finally, are democratic regimes in the Middle East likely to express different foreign policy objectives from those of their more authoritarian counterparts and will democracy contribute to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict?

---

[128] Zacek (1993), p. 257

Bibliography

Books

Bekkers, Victor, Geske Dijkstra, Arthur Edwards and Meno Fenger, eds. (2007), *Governance and the Democratic Deficit: Assessing the Democratic Legitimacy of Governance Practices* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing)

Bratton, Michael and Nicolas van de Walle (1997), *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

Brown, Nathan and Emad Shahin (2009),*The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East: Regional Politics and External Policies* (London: Routledge)

Brownlee, Jason (2007), *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

Brynen, Rex, Baghat Korany and Paul Noble, eds. (1995), *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World*, Volume 1: Theoretical Perspectives (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers)

Burnell, Peter & Richard Youngs, eds, (2010), *New Challenges to Democratization* (New York: Routledge)

Centre for European Studies (2008), *Crossing Bridges – Democratization in the Middle East and a Christian Democratic Approach* (Brussels: Centre for European Studies)

Coicaud, Jean-Marc (2002), *Legitimacy and Politics: A Contribution to the Study of Political Right and Political Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

Dahl, Robert and Ian Shapiro and José Cheibub, eds. (2003), *The Democracy Sourcebook* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

Garnham, David (1995), *Democracy, War and Peace in the Middle East* (Indiana: Indiana University Press)

Gause, Gregory (1994), *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations)

Herb, Michael (1999), *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies* (Albany, NY: State University of NY Press)

Huntington, Samuel (1991a), *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press)

Huntington, Samuel (1996), *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster)

Kamrava, Mehran (2011), *The Modern Middle East: A Political History Since the First World War* (London: University of California Press)

Kedourie, Ellie (1992), *Democracy and Arab political culture* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy)

Patai, Raphael (1973), *The Arab Mind* (New York: Scribner)

Posusney, Marsha P. and Michele P. Angrist (2005), *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner)

Przeworski, A., Alvarez, M., Cheibub, J. A., and Limongi, F. (2000), *Democracy and Development: Political Regimes and Economic Well-being in the World, 1950-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

Ross, Michael (2001b), *Timber Booms and Institutional Breakdown in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

Rubin, Barry (2002), *The Tragedy of the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

Sharabi, Hisham (1988), *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press)

Shora, Nawar (2009), *The Arab-American Handbook: A Guide to the Arab, Arab-American, and Muslims Worlds* (Seattle: Cune Press)

Touraine, Alain (1997), *What is Democracy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press)

Weber, Marx (1964), *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation* (London: Free Press)

Articles and Chapters in Books

Anderson, Lisa (2001), 'Arab Democracy: Dismal Prospects', *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 53-60.

Anderson, Lisa (2011), 'Demystifying the Arab Spring: Parsing the differences between Tunisia, Egypt and Libya', Foreign Affairs, Vol. 90, N.3, pp. 2-7.

Arias, Oscar (2011), 'Culture Matters: The Real Obstacles to Latin American Development', Foreign Affairs, Vol. 90, N.1, pp.2-6.

Belasco, Amy (2011), 'The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11', *Congressional Research Service*, CRS Report for Congress, RL33110, pp. 1-59.

Bellin, Eva (2004), 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No.2, pp. 139-156.

Brumberg, Daniel (2002), 'Democratization in the Arab World? The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy', *Journal of Democracy,* Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 56-68.

Carothers, Thomas and Marina Ottaway (2005), 'The new democracy imperative', in Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, eds., *Uncharted journey: promoting democracy in the Middle East* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), pp. 1-12.

Dalacoura, Katarina (2005), 'US democracy promotion in the Arab Middle East since 11 September 2001: a critique', *International Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 5, pp. 963-979.

Desai, Raj, Anders Olofsgard and Tarik Yousef (2009), 'The Logic of Authoritarian Bargains', *Economics & Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 93-125.

Diamond, Larry (2002) 'Thinking About Hybrid Regimes', *Journal of Democracy,* Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 21-35.

Diamond, Larry (2010), 'Why are there no Arab democracies?,' *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 93-104.

Doran, Michael Scott (2011), 'The Heirs of Nasser', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 3, pp. 17-25.

Ehteshami, Anoushiravan and Steven Wright (2007), 'Political change in the Arab oil monarchies: from liberalization to enfranchisement', *International Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 5, p. 913-932.

Essam El-Din, Gamal (2004), 'Brotherhood Steps into the Fray', *Al-Ahram*, Issue No. 681, http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2004/681/eg3.htm, last accessed June 10, 2011.

Gause, Gregory (1995), 'Regional Influences on Experiments in Political Liberalization in the Arab World', in Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Noble, eds., *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers), pp. 283-306.

Gause, Gregory (2011), 'Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 4, pp. 81-90.

Gleditsch, K. S. and Ward, M. D. (2006). 'Diffusion and the international context of democratization', *International Organization*, Vol. 60:911–933.

Goldstone, Jack (2011), 'Understanding the Revolutions of 2011: Weakness and Resilience in Middle Eastern Autocracies', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 3, pp. 8-16

Haass, Richard (2003), 'Toward Greater Democracy in the Muslim World', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No.3, pp.137-148.

Haass, Richard (2011), 'The Arab Spring Has Given Way to a Long Hot Summer', *Financial Times,* July 6, 2011.

Heydemann, Steven (2007), 'Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World', *Saban Centrer Analysis Paper*, No. 13, pp. 1-38.

Huntington, Samuel (1991b), 'Democracy's Third Wave', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 12-34.

Ibrahim, Saad Eddin (1995), 'Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World: An Overview', in Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Noble, eds., *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers), pp. 29-60.

Ibrahim. S. Eddin (2004), 'An Open Door', *Wilson Quarterly*, vol. 28, (Spring 2004), pp. 36–46.

International Labour Organization ILO (2006), 'Global Employment Trends for Youth', pp.1-52.

Lynch, Marc (2004), 'Shattering the "Politics of Silence": Satellite Television Talk Shows and the Transformation of Arab Political Culture', *Arab Reform Bulletin* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), Vol.2, No. 11, pp.2-3.

Mahdavy, Hossein (1970), 'Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran', in M.A. Cook, ed., *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 428-467.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Saudi Arabia (2007), 'Saudi Business Women Control 21% of Kingdom Investments', *Diplomat*, Issue 6, March 2007, p.64

Noland, Marcus (2005), 'Explaining Middle East Authoritarianism', Working Papers, *Institute for International Economics*, Vol. 5, No. 5, pp. 1-27.

Okruhlik, Gwenn (1999), 'Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of the Opposition: The Political Economy of Oil States', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 31, No.3, pp.295-315

Payne, James (2009), 'Making the World Safe for Muddle: The Meaning of Democracy in American Foreign Policy', *The Independent Review,* Vol. 14, No. 4, pp. 601-610.

Perlini, Caterina (2011), 'What are the most important reasons for the "democracy deficit" in the Middle East, and what are the most powerful driving forces for democratization?', King's College London, International Politics of the Middle East, Essay No.2

Ross, Michael (2001a), 'Does Oil Hinder Democracy?' *World Politics*, Vol. 53, No.3, pp. 325-361

Ross, Michael (2008), 'Oil, Islam and Women', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 102, No.1, pp. 107-123.

Saghia, Hazem (2001), 'Arab Voices for Change and Progress', in *al-Hayat,* February 21, 2001. Translation in Middle East Media Research Institute, No. 198, March 27, 2001.

Sharp, Jeremy (2006), 'US Democracy Promotion in the Middle East: The Islamist Dilemma', CRS Report for Congress, pp. 1-28.

Shehata, Dina (2011), 'The Fall of the Pharaoh: How Hosni Mubarak's Reign Came to an End', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 3, pp. 26-32.

Waterbury, John (1997), 'From Social Contract to Extraction Contracts: The Political Economy of Authoritarianism and Democracy', in John Entelis, ed., *Islam, Democracy and the State in North Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), pp. 141-176.

Williamson, T. (2008), 'The good society and the good soul: Plato's Republic on leadership', *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. *19*, No.4, pp. 397-408.

Yom, Sean and Mohammad Al-Momani (2008), 'The international dimensions of authoritarian regime stability: Jordan in the post-Cold War era', *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol.30, No.1, pp.39-60.

Zacek, Jane Shapiro (1993), 'Prospects for Democratic Rule', *In Depth: A Journal for Values and public Policy*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 257-277.

Web Sites

Anderson, Lisa (March 23, 2011), 'Arab World Political Unrest', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, http://www.c-spanarchives.org/program/WorldUp&showFullAbstract=1, July 4, 2011

Anderson (July 13, 2011), http://www.scribd.com/doc/60577554/Lisa-Anderson-%E2%80%94-Democracy-Authoritarianism-and-Regime-Change-in-the-Arab-World , July 2011

Arab League – The League of Arab States', http://www.arab.de/arabinfo/league.htm, July 22, 2011,

Bush, George W. (2003), 'Remarks by President George W. Bush', http://www.ned.org/george-w-bush/remarks-by-president-george-w-bush-at-the-20th-anniversary, 10 June 2011

Congressional Research Service (2009), 'Foreign Aid: An Introductory Overview of US Programs and Policy', http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/124970.pdf, pp. 12-15, July 22, 2011

Farley, Jonathan G. (March 1993), 'Algeria: Democracy 'on hold'.' *Contemporary Review,* http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2242/is_n1526_v262/ai_13810537/?tag=mantle_skin;content, August 04, 2011

Kuran, Timur (2011), 'The Weak Foundations of Arab Democracy', *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/29/opinion/29kuran.html , 10 May 2011

Inglehart, Ronald and Pippa Norris (2003), 'The True Clash of Civilization', http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/Inglehart%20Foreign%20Policy.pdf, 10 May 2011

Liberal Democracy and its Limits', http://www.colgate.edu/portaldata/imagegallerywww/2ead5faf-9854-4baa-b99b-2ca2ff42a950/ImageGallery/theme.pdf, July 22, 2011

Louer, Laurence (June 2011), 'Bahrain's National Dialogue and the Ever-Deepening Sectarian Divide', *Arab Reform Bulletin*, http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/06/29/bahrain-s-national-dialogue-and-ever-deepening-sectarian-divide/mxw, 4 July 2011

Perlo-Freeman, Sam (2009), 'Arms Transfers to the Middle East', UNIDIR – SIPRI Background Paper http://www.unidir.org/pdf/activites/pdf3-act465.pdf, 10 May 2011

Popham, Peter (February 2011), 'The price of food is at the heart of this wave of revolutions', *The Independent*, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/the-price-of-food-is-at-the-heart-of-this-wave-of-revolutions-2226896.html , July 4, 2011

Population Reference Bureau (2007), 'Youth in MENA', http://www.prb.org/pdf07/youthinMENA.pdf, July 4, 2011

'Rice calls for Mid-East Democracy' (2005), BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4109902.stm, 10 June 2011

Stiglitz, Joseph and Linda Bilmes (2010), 'The true cost of the Iraq War', *The Washington Post*, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/03/AR2010090302200.html, 10 June 2011

Stone, Andrea (2011), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/05/18/obama-middle-east-speech-billions-aid_n_863927.html, *HuffPost World*, July 22, 2011

US Department of State (2010), 'Background Note: Egypt', Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5309.htm, 10 May 2011

Yerkes, Sarah (2004), 'The Middle East Partnership Initiative', The Brookings Institution, http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2004/1129middleeast_wittes.aspx, 10 June 2011

Zakaria, Fareed (2011), 'Egypt's Real Parallel to Iran's Revolution', http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-real-egypt-iran-parallel/2011/02/06/ABO8b5E_story.html, July 22, 2011.

'Arab Spring: An Interactive Timeline of Middle East Protests' (June 2011), *The Guardian*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline, 27 June 2011

'Defense Spending in Middle East expected to surpass $100 billion by 2014', (January 2010), http://www.frost.com/prod/servlet/press-release.pag?docid=189276179, July 22, 2011

'Freedom in the World 2011: The Authoritarian Challenge to Democracy', (2011), http://www.freedomhouse.org/images/File/fiw/FIW%202011%20Booklet_1_11_11.pdf, July 22, 2011

'Revolution Spinning in the Wind' (July, 2011), *The Economist*, http://www.economist.com/node/18958237?story_id=18958237, July 22, 2011

'Syria: Casualties mount in Baniyas after protesters call for Assad regime to fall', *Los Angeles Times*, (April 2011), http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2011/04/syria-baniyas-security-arms-protests-injured-killed.html, 28 June 2011

'UNDP Releases the First Arab Human Development Report' (2002), http://www.arab-hdr.org/publications/contents/2002/execsum-02e.pdf, 27 June 2011

'World Bank Definition: MENA', http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/MENAEXT/0,,menuPK:247619~pagePK:146748~piPK:146812~theSitePK:256299,00.html , July 4, 2011