



The Latent Arab **Democratic Revolution**

Introduction

The Arab countries have the highest concentration of dictatorship in the world. According to the UN Arab Human Development Report of 2004, they are also among the countries with the most stifled economies. The question of democracy in the Middle East has become the renewed focus of debate throughout the region, and outside it, in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001. The West, particularly the USA, views democracy and responsible governance as a long-term means to prevent terrorism. Yet the people living under oppressive regimes in the region also desire democratic reform, although this does not necessarily amount to support of US foreign policy. In 2003 the US Administration under President George W.

Bush dramatically announced a fundamental shift in policy towards the region. Having previously supported conservative autocratic regimes in the name of security, now the priority was to be democracy. However, the new policy had to work under conditions created by the old. Having stifled secular and democratic developments, the USA now confronted a region where Islam had become the most significant political force.

Nevertheless, as a result of US declarations, and of the response of some local regimes to them, democracy and reform--terms rarely heard before, and even taboo, in autocratic countries--are now common parlance. Their meaning is debated in forums as diverse as traditional coffee shops and internet chat rooms, but what their significance is remains vague and ambivalent. Some consider democracy to be a Western phenomenon and thus an imposition. Others link it to indigenous Islamic principles and adapt it to suit their purposes.

However, regardless of whether the concept of democracy is ignored, rejected or accepted, the dangers of curtailing it are explosive. The UN reported in 2004 that: unless Arab governments move much more quickly towards reform they could face "chaotic" social upheaval. Indeed, it is the volatile mix of repression, disempowerment and alienation that breeds

the violent extremists that the global 'war on terror' is seeking to fight. However, the success of Islamist movements in recent elections in Egypt and the Palestinian territories have exposed the limits of the democratic agenda, while the obsession with security has strengthened repression by providing dictators with a pretext to clamp down on their domestic opponents, including liberal reformers.

The confluence of autocracy and Islamism produces some curious effects. It is a striking reality that in the Arab world the faces of rulers and kings are everywhere, while the faces of women are hidden and opposition movements are forced to retreat abroad. Yet gender is not the only basis of marginalization. Arab dictatorships routinely divide their population on the basis of religion, sect and tribal or ethnic belonging. This essay explores how the tensions caused by autocracy, Islamism and popular pressure for reform play out in four different Arab contexts--Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia--whose geopolitical positions place them under particular strain. It then turns to broader questions concerning the prospects for democratic change.

Egypt: Internal Stagnation

President Hosni Mubarak has ruled Egypt since 1981 under a permanent state of emergency, with cyclical waves of repression affecting all sectors of the opposition, together with continued government control of the judiciary and a weak parliament. Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP) offers a vivid example of the manipulation of democratic terminology through cosmetic reforms, at the expense of genuine liberalization and real progress towards the rule of law. During the 2005 elections, independent candidates faced massive obstacles arising from the NDP's determination to maintain control of both the parliament and local councils.

Security concerns have become the official outlet from real political reform, with new penalties introduced for journalists

who breach national interests. In 2003 Mubarak stated that a new Anti-Terrorist Law would replace the Emergency Law that had been in force since 1981. Yet three years later, the Emergency Law remains in force, and the powers envisaged by Mubarak under the new legislation would still authorize the Government to prohibit strikes, demonstrations and public meetings, as well as censoring or closing newspapers, all in the name of national security.

Meanwhile, the Muslim Brotherhood, a banned Islamist organization, remains the sole rival to the NDP. Despite being forced to contest recent elections under different names, the Muslim Brotherhood won the overwhelming majority of the seats it contested. Its success was to translate social and community work into an effective electoral challenge to Mubarak's regime. As a result, free, fair and contested elections are unlikely to determine who or what will come after Mubarak. On the contrary, the Egyptian President is now gearing up for a dynastic transition, with talk of his son, Gamal Mubarak, succeeding him.

Iraq and Syria: The Perils of Reform from Without

A key question for policy makers has been whether democracy can be imposed externally or must instead originate from indigenous developments. The debate surrounding this question crystallized around the shift in the US approach to the region following the events of 11 September 2001, a shift that led directly to the invasion and occupation of Iraq. President Bush claimed that the removal of Saddam Hussain's authoritarian regime and the development of democracy in Iraq would serve as a beacon for the entire region, creating a democratic 'domino effect'.

In practice, the imposition of democracy has unleashed civil strife, exposing the absence of a unifying Iraqi identity. In the absence of Saddam Hussain's repression, primordial identities based on religion and ethnicity have taken centre stage, dividing Iraqis and turning them against each other.

In Syria, President Bashar Assad's regime has been able to use the Iraqi experience and US threats against it to mobilize the population in support of the regime's 'security first' approach. Ironically, therefore, the US drive for democracy in the Middle East has led to the Syrian regime's becoming less democratic, while the Iraqi experience has sown such chaos that it seems unimaginable that it could be used as a blueprint for future democratic reform.

Clearly, there is a disconnect in Iraq between democratic institution-building and the facts on the ground. In 2005 Iraq held three major popular votes: in January the Interim Government conducted an election to establish a constitutional committee, whose draft Constitution was ratified by the electorate in October, enabling a parliamentary election in December. In June 2006, following almost six months of paralysis, Iraq's democratically elected national unity Government finally filled all of its cabinet positions.

In the same month, however, Baghdad's central morgue reported the highest monthly body count since the start of the US-led

invasion in March 2003. The new Government, a shaky coalition that includes the three major sectarian groupings--Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds--thus faces the difficult task of halting the cycle of violence while maintaining a veneer of unity.

The track record of such regimes in the region is not promising. Lebanon's democracy, similarly characterized by the need for consensus among its major sectarian groups, collapsed under regional pressures in 1975, bringing about a 15-year civil war that ended in 1990. Beirut, once known as the Paris of the Middle East, became a partitioned war zone.

Moreover, the restoration of peace came at the price of Lebanon's sovereignty, which has been limited by Syria--and by the Hezbollah militia's control of the south since the end of the civil war.

The lesson of Lebanon is that a fragile political entity cannot be expected to withstand a perilous international environment. The same is, of course, true of Iraq--once a brutal, centralized authoritarian state that is now a weak, diffuse democratic state wracked by increasingly vicious sectarian fighting. Such fighting has intensified since the attack on the Samarra Mosque in March 2006; thousands have been killed and hundreds of thousands have been forced to flee their homes as ethnic cleansing turns Baghdad into a mosaic of fortified neighborhoods guarded by Sunni and Shiite militias.

Beyond the threat of civil war, most of the Iraqi Government is Islamist to varying degrees, further complicating the prospects for democracy. Grand Ayatollah Ali as-Sistani is seen as a godsend by the US Administration: a quietist figure who consistently argued for early elections and a democratically ratified constitution. Yet, despite as-Sistani's obvious legitimacy within the Shi'a clerical hierarchy, it is the radical Muqtada as-Sadr who has arguably become the most powerful figure in Iraq. Indeed, the political institutionalization of ethnic and sectarian divisions is highlighted not only by as-Sadr's success, but also by the poor showings of secularist exile figures such as Dr Ayad Allawi and Ahmad Chalabi.

Paradoxically, in its pursuit of democracy in Iraq, the USA has thus succeeded in empowering a radical Islamic preacher who is determined to implement his personal interpretation of Sharia (Islamic law). As-Sadr has nurtured his kingmaker role, using the legitimacy that he inherited from his father--and that he reinforced in fighting against US forces in 2004--to pursue a welfarist policy, aided by his control of the health and education ministries. Meanwhile, as-Sadr's militia, the Mahdi Army, has been linked to the bombing of stores selling alcohol, the killing of three Iraqi tennis players (for wearing shorts), and strict enforcement of women's obligation to wear the Hijab.

As a result, far from becoming a beacon of democracy in the Middle East, Iraq has come to stand for the failure of the USA's effort post-11 September 2001 to redefine the region in its own image. Instead of causing democratic dominoes to fall elsewhere in the region, US policy has led to the entrenchment of authoritarian tendencies in neighboring Syria. The talk in Damascus is no longer about democratic reform, but of securing the country from potential US aggression.

This is a remarkable turn of events. Following the death of President Hafez al-Assad in 2000, there was much hope of a democratic opening in Syria. Bashar, his son and successor, had spent time in the West and was married to a Western-born wife. Indeed, Bashar's inauguration coincided with the "Damascus Spring: political prisoners were released and political discussion groups burgeoned. However, this opening was not to survive the subsequent change in the regional climate, with the outbreak of the second intifada by Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and the 11 September attacks refocusing the Syrian regime on the paramount importance of securing the country.

The US embrace of pre-emptive regime change for authoritarian states with links to terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, together with events in Iraq, concerned the Syrian regime greatly. The main question was whether the US Administration would turn left to Damascus or right to Tehran as the next stage of its 'global war on terror'. To be sure, when compared to Iran, Syria remains a junior member of the 'axis of evil', and the ruling Baath Party is certainly no friend to the revolutionary anarchy of al-Qaida, having fought its own battle against Islamic militants in the early 1980s. Nevertheless, Assad was the region's most vocal critic of the invasion of Iraq, which put thousands of US troops on his border.

According to the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, Assad was on the 'wrong side of events in the Middle East'.

Opposing the USA meant facing a steady escalation of international pressure and deepening isolation. Following the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005, Syria was forced out of Lebanon and seemed to be on the ropes, a low-hanging fruit in a region pushed into crisis by the seemingly contradictory demands of democracy and stability. Yet the Syrian regime has been able to withstand the pressure, as the situation in Iraq has deteriorated and the threat from Iran has forced the USA to adopt a more 'realist' foreign policy in the region. In March 2006 the shift in US priorities away from regime change in Syria was reflected in the regime's tighter hold over the country, with Assad declaring as his three priorities 'security, the economy, and then political reform'.

As in Egypt, Syria has long been ruled under an Emergency Law, which in its case has been in effect since 1963. With domestic opposition increasingly stifled, former Vice-President Abd al-Halim Khaddam, now a leading anti-regime activist, and Muslim Brotherhood leader Ali Sadreddin al-Bayanouni met in London, United Kingdom, in June 2006 to highlight the opposition outside Syria and to promise that the regime would collapse from within. However, the Iraqi experience shows that the effectiveness of opposition groups abroad can be limited, however strong their rhetoric might be. For now, it seems that the new 'Lion of Damascus' has little reason to fear imminent democratic reform.

Saudi Arabia

The monarchies of the Gulf states sustain the rule of kings, sheiks and emirs with oil wealth and a traditional male hereditary

system. Nowhere else in the world does modernity appear as such a dilemma. Oil wealth fast-tracked these highly traditional regimes into the globalized world, thereby putting them on the defensive, especially with respect to gender relations and the treatment of expatriate workers.

Saudi Arabia offers the ultimate example of a country moving in two opposite directions at once. The country was ruled by King Fahd, who remained incapacitated following a stroke in 1995 until his death in 2005, when his 83-year-old brother, Abdullah, formally succeeded him, with a collection of octogenarian princes waiting in line. Skyscrapers rise out of the desert, while women are not allowed to walk in the streets unaccompanied by male relatives or sit behind the wheel of a car, and foreign workers need permission from sponsors to move from one city to another. Public beheadings in the capital, Riyadh, offer Taliban-like spectacles of despotic power. After Friday prayers, men do not go to movies (which are banned), but instead watch beheadings of homosexuals and the stoning to death of adulteresses.

Since the attacks of 11 September 2001, there has been unprecedented talk of reform, in part owing to mounting regional pressure, as the smaller Gulf states now compete in terms of democratic reforms. Qatar and Oman have enfranchised women and established elected consultative councils.

Parliamentary elections occur in Kuwait and Bahrain, and there is economic liberalization in the United Arab Emirates.

At the end of 2004 Sheikh Muhammad bin Rashid al-Mak-toum, Crown Prince of Dubai, recognized the full force of the popular desire for participation, declaring that Arab leaders must either reform or sink.

Saudi Arabia's rulers, fearing that the kingdom's status as the dominant regional power was in jeopardy, believed that they had to join the race for reform by staging municipal elections to consultative bodies, beginning in early 2005. One-half of the all-male membership of these bodies was appointed, and the female population was barred from voting, in line with the regime's embrace of the Wahhabi religious definition of activities that are compatible with the 'nature of women'.

Nevertheless, the Government described the elections as the dawn of a 'new political era'.

Elections cannot be separated from constitutional reform, despite the Government's efforts to uphold such a distinction.

The most crucial question concerns reform of the *Majlis ash-Shura* (Consultative Council): Can it become a real parliament? Would it be elected, and, if so, who would do the electing?

Currently, the King appoints the *Majlis*'s members, who do not have the power to debate or legislate, but merely approve the King's proposals. In January 2005 King Fahd announced an increase in the number of *Majlis* members from 120 to 150, but their responsibilities remained vague. Similarly, Abdullah established an official King Abd al-Aziz Centre for National Dialogue as an acknowledgement of pluralism and diversity, with the country's main religious sects-Salafis (Wahhabis), Sufis and Shia gathering for the first time. However, since the

National Dialogue's discussions have not been endorsed by the Wahhabi religious authorities, nothing has changed in everyday life: the Shia, who are considered to be heretics and apostates, still cannot practise their religious rituals, be witnesses in court, or even work as butchers.

As a result, marginalization and exclusion continue to prevail over any hope of greater freedom and transparency, while the National Dialogue itself, having become utterly divorced from domestic reality, has turned into a propaganda centre whose participants believe that they are part of the state's message to the outside world. Indeed, officials have since downgraded the National Dialogue to an intellectual encounter'. A recent meeting resulted in a procession of grand speeches by officials seeking to convince young Saudi men that political and social conditions in the country are ideal.

There is, of course, little to support the official government line. Political expression is still constrained, demonstrations remain illegal, and barriers to social mobility continue to be practically insurmountable. When Abdullah, who was then Crown Prince, sought in 2004 to make a show of greater openness, a stream of petitioners took him at his word. The petitioners, including a group of intellectuals who called for a constitutional monarchy, were quickly silenced and the most stubborn were imprisoned, leaving the King and especially the Ministry of Interior to concentrate on security first.

Is Democracy Possible?

To a greater or lesser degree, power throughout the region is exercised without responsibility. Endemic corruption, the absence of the rule of law, appalling human rights violations, arbitrary arrests and imprisonment without legal representation, lack of freedom of expression, organization and assembly, and the repression of minorities and of women are basic elements of political life. The aspirations and needs of rapidly growing populations go unmet, and the gap between the ruled and the rulers is vast and widening, dissolving the trust that cements any state's authority.

This grim picture of universal, if varied, despotism seems set in stone. However, the stone will inevitably fracture. Arab regimes not only face the challenges of globalization, but are also confronted by extraordinary demographic changes. With one-half of the population of the Gulf states under 15 years old, for example, a vast new generation is becoming an entirely new social force. Arab leaders can still choose whether to listen to their people and develop their countries' huge pools of human potential or face mounting violence and extremism among the alienated and underemployed young. They know that the choice is between political reform and endless confrontation and repression, a struggle that they may not win. Indeed, inaction will merely lead to further isolation from the world and risk turning a crisis of legitimacy into something far worse, such as civil war or foreign intervention. As John F. Kennedy said: Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable?

Some observers argue that Arabs are not ready for democracy, because they are ill-suited to more liberal and accountable governance. In fact, there is a deep yearning for freedom, justice and greater equality. The people of the Arab countries are open to democratic reform, but it is the rulers who need to change their ways and breathe life into ossified institutions in order to ensure political accountability and provide space for suppressed minorities and women. Without such institutional space, there can be no empowerment and thus no genuine political stability.

What is it that stands between the popular desire for democracy and the political action needed to bring it about?

What does it take to inspire democratic revolutions? Can outside support help local forces? The advertising company Saatchi & Saatchi attempted to support the demonstrations of the 'Cedar Revolution' in Lebanon. Yet Hezbollah staged an even bigger pro-Syrian demonstration in Beirut a week later, dispelling the appearance of revolutionary unity. Outside help is but one small factor in a complex process.

As Eric Hoffer has noted, revolutions are not so much the cause for change as change is the cause of revolutions. With the prospect of regime change now on the agenda because President Bush put it there by military means, popular forces allied to foreign powers are battling to shape the emerging democratic impulse. The question for Arab dictators is how to play the game of democracy, but not necessarily by Bush's rules.

Recognizing that everything must change if everything is to stay the same, they now use the terminology of democracy for their own ends. Afraid of true participatory politics, Arab leaders rush to find magic words selected from Western models but legitimized by Islamic codes, resulting in potions formulated to pose no threat to the status quo.

Thus 'election' has become the region's buzzword, with popular votes held in recent years not only in Iraq, but also in Egypt, the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, Iran and the smaller Gulf states, in addition to Saudi Arabia's more timid attempt to hold partial municipal elections. However, without the commitment to constitutionalism—a balance of powers, including checks on the executive and an independent judiciary—that forms the basis of democratic political culture, these elections will do nothing to stem popular frustration.

The Hamas Contradiction

The victory of Hamas in the Palestinian parliamentary election in January 2006 highlighted the inherent contradictions in the West's drive for democracy in the region. Although it could be argued that Fatah lost more than Hamas won, the reality was that the stalled peace process meant that Hamas's rejectionist stance, combined with its social welfare services and lack of corruption, made it a popular choice for Palestinians.

Hamas, contesting the election under the guise of the Change and Reform List, won 42.9% of the vote and 74 of the 132 seats. However, the immediate reaction of the USA and the European

Union (EU) was to refuse to deal with the new administration, cutting off vital aid money that had been used to pay Palestinian civil servants. Bush stressed that: 'If your platform is the destruction of Israel, it means you're not a partner in peace, and we're interested in peace. British Prime Minister Tony Blair recognized the democratic mandate, but warned that Hamas had to choose either a path of democracy or a path of violence'.

The Palestinian issue remains a tinderbox in the Middle East. To embrace democracy and subsequently be marginalized for their choice suggests to Palestinians that a double standard is being used, and fuels conspiracy theories that the Western project is more concerned with protecting Israeli interests than with promoting real political reform.

Dov Weissglas, an adviser to the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, outlined the rationale underlying the policy of isolation toward the Palestinian administration: 'It's like a meeting with a dietician. We have to make them much thinner, but not enough to die.' Yet regardless of how thin and close to collapse the Palestinian body politic may become, its faith in Western intentions and the benefits of democracy will inevitably be affected. Moreover, just as the marginalization of Fatah led to the emergence of Hamas, the isolation of Hamas will strengthen more radical groups, such as Islamic Jihad and al-Qaida, in the West Bank and Gaza.

International meddling is not a recent development, of course. While Yasser Arafat was President of the Palestinian (National) Authority, the international community attempted desperately to transfer powers to the Prime Minister; following the election of a Hamas Prime Minister, exactly the reverse is occurring, with President Mahmud Abbas seen as a voice of moderation.

Nevertheless, the process has moved on. Olmert's electoral mandate for unilateral disengagement from the West Bank prompted the Palestinian President, Mahmud Abbas, to make one last throw of the democratic dice, calling for a referendum in late July 2006 asking the Palestinian people to recognize Israel and endorse a two-state solution to the conflict. Unfortunately we may not know the outcome of such a vote or the fate of Palestinian democracy in the short term. While Abbas and the Hamas administration reached consensus on the way forward in talks with Israel, Hamas's military wing was apparently unwilling to put Olmert to the test, instead killing

General Survey

Two Israeli soldiers and abducting another, triggering Israel's invasion of Gaza and thereby rendering the question irrelevant.

Oil, Education, Islam and Reform

The Arab world is generally divided into oil- versus non-oil-producing countries. Some have called oil a 'curse', for it stifles development and encourages corruption. However, oil is a curse only in the absence of democracy—a shortcoming that the commodity has, of course, reinforced. In a twist on one of the animating principles of the American Revolution, oil money

has bribed the people into silence and submission: 'no taxation, so no representation'. Together with an influx of cheap foreign workers, oil wealth has transformed citizens into a rentier class, and has reduced women's status to that of protected housewives. Although the volatility of world oil markets leaves these countries vulnerable to external shocks, high prices since 2001 have left their rulers awash in cash—and thus in a strong position to put off the day of reckoning.

The huge windfall of oil wealth since the 1950s has not only restructured employment patterns; it has also distorted educational systems that were designed to meet the needs of rigidly hierarchical traditionalist and patriarchal social orders. In Saudi Arabia, for example, the educational system is a central mechanism for socializing the vast majority of the population into a specifically Saudi national identity. The system thus embodies the tensions that lie at the heart of the Saudi state, owing to the symbiotic relationship between the religious and political establishments. Textbooks—pink for girls and blue for boys emphasize the rules prescribed by the religious and political elites, and religious texts constitute 50% of the national curriculum. The result has been to widen the huge skills gap in the country and leave the economy with insufficient indigenous expertise. Thus, despite high oil prices, unemployment remains high, with graduates of the Sharia colleges being the worst affected.

Such failures are no secret. In an age of globalized information, Arab populations know that their rulers are inefficient, corrupt and unable to provide responsive leadership. Satellite television channels like Al-Jazeera expose the problems of dictatorship to ordinary Arabs every day. In fact, the Arab world's authoritarian regimes are powerless in the face of the rising tide of digital information. The openings in the social order implied by globalization are expanding much faster than the constraints of the aged clerics. Rulers who devise strategies to meet the demands of the young generation may survive, while those who stick their heads in the sand or seek legitimacy in fatwas are ultimately doomed.

For now, however, many regimes are taking the latter course. Arab rulers, knowing that the population is aware of their incompetence, are scared, reinforcing their state of paralysis. Thus, while digital technology fosters greater openness, it has also provoked governments into taking more repressive measures. Indeed, the Saudi ruling family justifies continued absolutist monarchy by falling back on the argument that democracy is incompatible with Islam—a claim that exposes the intentional deceptiveness underlying putative reforms like partial elections and consultative bodies.

It is also a claim that the majority of Muslim scholars, including the Sheikh of Al-Azhar in Cairo and the influential Qatar-based Sheikh Qaradawi, reject. They argue that Islam and democracy are compatible. According to this interpretation, democracy is defined as respect for the rule of law political equality among citizens, a fair distribution of wealth, an independent judiciary, and freedom of expression and assembly. To be sure, the right to a real choice of leadership, and the extent of elected representatives' powers, remain debatable and contentious. But

there is no theological basis for rulers to claim that religious piety rules out democratization.

In fact, it is not only Arab political systems that are decayed and discredited: increasingly, religious dogmas are being revealed as the political tools they have been. Theological apologies for authoritarianism are losing legitimacy, and are coming to be viewed as an impediment to genuine, inclusive reform and integration into the global economy. More and more ordinary Arabs perceive the absence of transparency and accountability, not Islam, as the cause of their societies' stagnation.

Keeping the world at bay is impossible, particularly when the world's lone superpower now finds itself ensconced in the region. However, while Bush's policy of regime change has unsettled everyone, it remains selective. The 'axis of evil' finds itself in the USA's sights, but the 'axis of oil' remains in Washington's good graces regardless of its cruelty, incompetence and instability. Bush praised Saudi Arabia's sham elections, as well as Mubarak's pseudo-democratic opening in Egypt.

Thus, many liberal Arabs still regard the USA as a key obstacle to reform and renewal, despite the Bush Administration's pro-democratic rhetoric. After all, the true test of democracy lies in the gap between the promise and the reality of popular accountability. As long as the US Administration prefers stability to the risk of a democratically elected Islamist government in Egypt, and as long as Saudi Arabia's despots keep the oil flowing at peak capacity, the dynamic for change will not receive the unquestioning US backing that it needs.

At the same time, however, the war in Iraq, coming after decades of economic failure, have shaken all the regimes in the Middle East. There is a huge, educated, moderate and liberal silent

majority that knows this, and, unlike their rulers, many know what type of societies they want: open to the world, to economic change, to social justice and to equality of individual rights.

Indeed, the Islamist threat appears so large because we have focused on it to the exclusion of everything else. We must learn to differentiate that threat by recognizing and supporting those rulers who are genuinely committed to political reform, for only greater liberalization can prevent Islamists from claiming the mantle of sole genuine opposition--as they were able to do in the recent elections in Egypt and the Palestinian territories. By contrast, we saw the beginnings of a truly democratic wave in Lebanon. Although democracy in Lebanon may be doomed by the country's continuing status as a proxy for other states, the wave has spread to Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman.

Other Arabs want to join that wave, which implies that the West should seek opportunities to support those in the region, particularly moderate and liberal intellectuals, who are working to reform their societies from within. Too often, the USA, the United Kingdom and other EU countries betray their principles by remaining silent when such people are imprisoned for demanding change.

Goethe reminds us that revolution is never the fault of the people but of the government'. We may, at long last, be seeing the beginning of a true Arab democratic revolution. Inevitably, change has proceeded unevenly, and will continue to do so, reflecting the different social and political contexts in which it is occurring. What is clear is that indigenous movements will be the driving force of change everywhere. Indeed, the best hope for the region's secular authoritarians and Islamists alike is that the USA recognizes this and adjusts its policies accordingly.

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