

Session 3: Bernard Lewis and the Freedom Agenda

Introduction

THE attacks of September 11, 2001, transformed an old scholarly question into an urgent problem of American statecraft. Why had a movement animated by intense hostility to the United States emerged from the Arab and Muslim world? What conditions had allowed it to flourish? And what, if anything, could American policy do about them? The immediate search for an answer produced the familiar question, “Why do they hate us?” But beneath it lay a more consequential argument about the political order of the Middle East. Was anti-American radicalism primarily a response to American policies—support for Israel, a military presence in the Gulf, sanctions on Iraq, and alliances with Arab regimes—or did it arise in part from the internal failures of Middle Eastern societies themselves: authoritarian rule, political exclusion, economic stagnation, and the suppression of independent thought?

In this atmosphere, Bernard Lewis acquired an authority in American public life that few historians ever attain. He had been writing about these questions for decades. Long before 9/11, he had asked whether Islamic political traditions contained resources for representative government, why earlier experiments with parliamentary rule had failed, and whether autocracy was inherent in Islam or the product of particular historical circumstances. His position was more nuanced than either his admirers or his critics sometimes acknowledged. He repeatedly emphasized the overwhelmingly autocratic record of Muslim political history, yet he also rejected the proposition that Muslim peoples were somehow inherently incapable of democracy. Islamic traditions of law, consultation, social mobility, and limits on rulers, he argued, could furnish materials from which a different political order might eventually be constructed.

After 9/11, these older arguments suddenly seemed to speak directly to the American predicament. Lewis became, for policymakers, journalists, and a broad reading public, something close to a sage: a scholar who could situate the attacks within a long history of Islam’s encounter with the West and explain the sources of Muslim resentment without reducing them to immediate events. His prominence also reflected the moment’s intellectual disorientation. Americans who had paid little sustained attention to Islamic

history now wanted large explanations, and Lewis offered one. The same Washington connections that had made him an influential interpreter of the region before 2001 brought him into closer proximity to officials associated with the Bush administration and the emerging case for political transformation in the Middle East. The packet itself notes his ties to figures such as Paul Wolfowitz and Dick Cheney and the consequent association of his reputation with the Iraq War.

The resulting argument aligned with what came to be known as the Bush administration's Freedom Agenda. The neoconservative current in American foreign policy had long distrusted the assumption that stability required accommodation with authoritarian rulers. After 9/11, that critique gained much greater force. The old bargain—Washington would support friendly autocrats so long as they protected American strategic interests—could now be portrayed not merely as morally compromised but as strategically self-defeating. Repression deprived political opposition of peaceful outlets, while American support for the repressors implicated the United States in their rule. Lewis gave this argument unusually sharp expression. He described Western indulgence of Arab dictators as a form of disrespect toward the peoples they governed and emphasized the resentment created by the perception that Washington cared more about Arab rulers' cooperation abroad than about what they did to their own subjects.

This argument helped redefine the meaning of the Iraq War. The decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein had many causes—security fears after 9/11, weapons of mass destruction, Saddam's record of aggression and defiance—but the war soon took on a broader ideological purpose. Iraq was imagined not merely as a dictatorship to be removed but as a potential lever for transforming the Arab world's political equilibrium. If a functioning constitutional order could be established in the heart of the Middle East, its example might weaken neighboring autocracies and demonstrate that Arabs were no less capable of representative government than Europeans, Asians, or Latin Americans. Lewis embraced precisely this possibility. Writing after the January 2005 Iraqi elections, he argued that their significance might extend far beyond Iraq and even suggested that a successful Iraqi democracy could constitute a “mortal threat” to authoritarian governments elsewhere in the region.

The Iraq project therefore turned an academic controversy into a policy test. For more than a century, scholars had debated whether the obstacles to democracy in the Middle East lay in Islam, political culture, socioeconomic structure, colonialism, state formation, or authoritarian rulers' actions. Now an American administration was acting on one answer: dictatorship was not the natural political condition of Arab societies, and changing the political environment could set in motion forces of liberalization beyond Iraq itself. In Lewis's later formulation, the entrenched dictatorships of the modern Middle East were not simply survivals of an immemorial Islamic order. Many were products of modern centralization and of imported European models—fascist, Nazi, Communist, and bureaucratic—that had vastly strengthened the coercive capacities of the state. If these structures were historically made, they might also be historically unmade.

The result was an extraordinary burst of intellectual activity. The years after 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq produced an explosion of writing by historians, political scientists, journalists, policy intellectuals, and Middle East specialists. The argument was no longer confined to whether Islam was “compatible” with democracy. It broadened into competing explanations of authoritarian persistence and democratic possibility. Some emphasized political culture and inherited institutions; others focused on oil, rentier states, weak civil societies, military establishments, colonial borders, American intervention, Islamist movements, or the absence of the social transformations that had accompanied democratization elsewhere. Public intellectuals debated whether the United States had tolerated dictatorship for too long or was now committing the opposite error by imagining that democracy could be imposed by external force. Area specialists, meanwhile, disputed whether the very attempt to formulate sweeping theories about “Islam” or “the Arab world” obscured the enormous differences among countries and historical experiences.

Lewis belongs at the center of this debate not because he offered a single, consistent formula but because his intellectual trajectory illustrates the shift that made the Freedom Agenda conceivable. His earlier writings were cautious about transplanting Western institutions and explicitly warned that political forms successful in Europe or America might fail when detached from the social and historical circumstances that produced them. He even suggested that Muslim societies might need to develop their own forms of democratic government rather than simply reproduce Western models. Yet by the early twenty-first century, he had become markedly more optimistic

that democratic change in Iraq could stimulate a wider regional transformation. He continued to insist that democracy could not simply be manufactured in Washington's image, but he now placed far greater emphasis on removing the obstacles that prevented indigenous democratic forces from developing.

The readings should therefore be approached on two levels. They trace Lewis's argument about Islam, autocracy, political culture, and democratic possibility over half a century. But they also illuminate the intellectual background to one of the most ambitious turns in modern American Middle East policy. After 9/11, the question of whether democracy could take root in the Arab world ceased to be only a matter for historians and political scientists. For a time, the United States made its answer a premise of war and a strategy for remaking the region. The controversies that followed—over Iraq, democracy promotion, authoritarian stability, political Islam, and the limits of American power—would dominate discussion of the Middle East for the next decade and have never entirely disappeared.

Explanatory notes to the readings appear from page 63.



Bernard Lewis (1916–2018) was among the most influential historians of the modern Middle East and the Islamic world. Trained at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, he combined a formidable command of Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Hebrew, and European languages with an unusually broad historical range, writing on topics ranging from medieval Islamic institutions and Ottoman archives to nationalism, antisemitism, and the encounter between Islam and the West. After a long career at the University of London, he joined Princeton University in 1974 and became a prominent interpreter of Middle Eastern history for both scholarly and general audiences. His lucid prose, comparative method, and emphasis on political culture gave his work exceptional reach, though his arguments about Islam, modernity, and Western influence also provoked sustained controversy. Few twentieth-century scholars did more to shape how the English-speaking world understood Middle Eastern history and politics.

After moving to the United States, Lewis gained unusual influence in Washington. He first connected with anti-Soviet Democrats around Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson, then with Republicans such as Paul Wolfowitz and Dick Cheney, becoming a frequently consulted authority on Islam, the Middle East, and political reform. These ties amplified his long-standing arguments about the Muslim world’s crisis and the possibility of democratic change. But they also linked him closely to the 2003 Iraq war: his support for removing Saddam Hussein and his hopes for political transformation made him, fairly or not, part of the intellectual case for the invasion and tied his reputation to its aftermath.



Democratic Institutions in the Islamic Middle East (1958)

DEMOCRACY is one of the magic words of our time, with a wide range of different meanings in different parts of the world. In the Middle East too the word has been used in a number of different senses, ranging from parliamentary government to royal condescension. During the last century, however, there has been in the countries of the Middle East a real attempt to apply our kind of democracy, with constitutional government, elected legislatures, and civil rights.

Today in most of the Middle East these democratic regimes are in a state of collapse or at least of disrepair. In Egypt, where democratic and parliamentary government has the longest history, the renunciation of the Western form of parliamentary democracy was most formal and final. In Saudi Arabia and in Afghanistan, still at an earlier stage of political evolution, democratic government has not yet been tried. In most other states where the experiment has been made, the democratic regimes have a precarious aspect. Only in Turkey, Israel and Lebanon does Western-style constitutional government seem to be developing with any reasonable prospect of success. Israel and Lebanon are excluded from present consideration as having entirely different backgrounds; Israel because of its predominantly immigrant population, Lebanon because of its peculiar religious and social conditions, which have no parallel anywhere else in the Middle East. The relative success of democracy in Turkey, however, a Middle Eastern and Islamic country which has much in common with the other countries of the Middle East, presents a striking contrast requiring explanation.

Islam was born in a small town republic, among a people just emerging from nomadism. Its earliest political memories are of an elected chief ruling by consent according to custom. These memories are enshrined, in the classical formulations of Islamic constitutional theory, and have remained in the background of Islamic political ideas ever since.

But the advent of the Islamic theocracy, by transferring the source of authority from the people to God, removed the consensual and revocable

element in that authority. Within a few generations of the death of the Prophet, the Islamic state had been refashioned under the influence of the absolutist traditions of the Hellenistic and old oriental monarchies; the Arab immigrants—as later the Turks—forgot the freer life of their nomadic days as they became part of the ancient city and river-valley civilisation of the Middle East.

For the greater part of its history the political experience of Islam has been limited to autocratic rule. Not until the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, when the doctrines of the French Revolution and other movements arising out of it began to percolate to the Middle East, did democratic ideas in the modern sense first reach the Islamic world. The introduction of these ideas seems to have begun with military instruction. The failure of the second Turkish attempt to capture Vienna in 1683, and the humiliating series of defeats that followed, impressed on the rulers of Turkey the weakness of their armed forces as compared with those of Europe. The example of Peter the Great's reforms in Russia encouraged the belief that the adoption of Western weapons, equipment and military techniques would restore the former superiority of Turkish arms.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in Turkey and later in Egypt, an attempt was made to modernise the armed forces and bring them up to the level of contemporary European armies in armament, training and skill. These reforms and training projects were almost all carried out under the guidance of French instructors, usually working in the French language. To receive their instruction and read their manuals, the young Muslim cadets therefore had to learn French—the first time that any important group in Muslim society acquired a reading knowledge of a Western language and sat as disciples at the feet of Western teachers. But these neophytes of Western science soon found that the West had more to offer than mathematics and military science, and that their knowledge of French enabled them to read other things besides their textbooks. Some of these other things were available to them in their own college libraries—that of Istanbul, we know, included a set of the *Encyclopedie*, that of Cairo some writings of Rousseau and Voltaire. We may assume that these and other works were brought to their notice by instructors, many of whom were chosen and appointed by the Government of the French Republic.

The impact of these new political ideas was immediate and striking, and by the early twentieth century not only the westward-looking liberals but even some of the orthodox religious leaders were paying at least lip-service to democracy, and showed their recognition of the power of the democratic idea by claiming it as an Islamic revelation contained in the Koran.

The Middle Eastern interest in democracy was not purely theoretical. There were also practical attempts to introduce this form of government into Middle Eastern countries. Consultative assemblies of one kind or another appear almost from the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1808, the reformist Ottoman Grand Vezir Bayrakdar Mustafa Pasha summoned a great imperial assembly in Istanbul, to which he invited high officials, governors, pashas, and notables from all over the Empire, and asked them to approve a far-reaching programme of reforms. In Egypt, Muhammad Ali Pasha convened a consultative council consisting of 156 members, nominated from among officials and notables. It first met in 1829, and thereafter met once a year for a day or more, and discussed such topics as education, agriculture, and even taxes. In 1845, the Turkish Sultan Abdul Mejid went so far as to convene an assembly of provincial notables. Two representatives were to be chosen in each province, 'from among those who are respected and trusted, are people of intelligence and knowledge, who know the requisites of prosperity and the characteristics of the population,' and sent to Istanbul to consult with the High Council. The delegates seem to have been confused by this new and unfamiliar procedure and, not knowing what they were expected to say, preferred to say nothing. Finally, in 1861, the Bey of Tunis proclaimed the first European-style constitution in a Muslim country. It reserved executive power to the Bey, but shared the legislative power between him and a Grand Council of sixty nominated members.

The first tentative experiment with an elected assembly occurred in Egypt, where in 1866 the Khedive Isma'il set up a consultative assembly with a restricted electorate and still more restricted functions. During the period of British occupation the parliamentary machinery was extended and improved, and in 1923 a new democratic constitution, based on the Belgian constitution of 1830-31, came into force. In Turkey the agitation for parliamentary government began in the 'sixties, and in December 1876 the first Ottoman constitution was proclaimed. After a general election—the first in Islamic history—a parliament assembled in Istanbul in March 1877. In February 1878 the Sultan dissolved the chamber; the constitution was

suspended for some thirty years and did not come into force again until after the revolution of 1908. In Persia the constitutional revolution came in 1906. After the First World War, under the aegis of the mandatory governments, constitutional regimes spread all over the Middle East in what seemed to be a universal triumph of democratic principles.

The process began more than a century and a half ago, when the armies of Napoleon and the ideas of the French Revolution awoke the peoples of the Middle East from their long slumber to a painful awareness of their own weakness and relative backwardness. Time was when the great and civilised Empires of the Middle East had looked down with justified contempt on the barbarous and illiterate peoples of the North and of the West. But Europe grew, matured, and renewed itself, while the Orient, sunk in the torpor of decay, failed to perceive or to understand the changes that had taken place, and continued to cherish—as we of the West still cherish—the dangerous but comfortable illusion of its own boundless and immutable superiority. In the course of the nineteenth century this illusion was at last shattered, at any rate as regards material things, and the peoples of the Orient awoke to a disagreeable reality in which their countries, their resources, their civilisations, even their very souls, were menaced by a West that was rich and powerful beyond belief, and which, in its limitless self-confidence and aggressiveness, seemed to be bringing the whole world within its grasp.

The first and natural reaction of the Oriental to this situation was one of wonderment, admiration, and more especially, of imitation, by which he hoped to win the elusive secret of Western wealth and power. To the eager young Muslim visitor to Europe, in search of that secret, it seemed natural to seek it in those features of European life and government that were most different from his own. One was science and technology. Another was liberalism which, in the Europe of that time, was the sacred cause of progress and enlightenment, combining the hopes both of the noblest of idealists and the most practical of businessmen and technicians—and what, to the visiting oriental, could be more peculiar, more distinctive of the West than constitutional and parliamentary government? Muslim students returning from their studies in Western universities carried with them new and explosive ideas to their own peoples.

The attitude of some of the first constitutionalists is well-expressed in a letter by Sadullah Pasha, describing the Paris Exhibition of 1878:

In front of the central gate one encounters a statue of freedom; she has a staff in her hand and is seated on a chair. Her appearance and manner convey this meaning to the spectator: “O worthy visitors! When you look upon this fascinating display of human progress, do not forget that all these perfections are the works of freedom. Under the protection of freedom do peoples and nations attain happiness. Where there is no freedom there can be no security; where there is no security there can be no endeavour; where there is no endeavour there can be no prosperity; where there is no prosperity there can be no happiness!”

Nationalism as well as liberalism was in the European air at that time—and both meant the end of the traditional Islamic order. In place of the theocratic Muslim society, in which social grouping is determined by religious affiliation, there came the new and disruptive Western idea of the nation, as a group of people bound together by language and origin, and entitled to political sovereignty. In place of the Sultan—wielding autocratic power as vicegerent of God upon earth and upholder of the Divine Law—came the Western paraphernalia of constitutions and parliaments, parties, programmes and politicians, elections and newspapers and the rest, all very pleasant for the small group of Western educated intellectuals who operated them, but completely meaningless to the great mass of the Muslim population.

All the same, the general attitude towards the West was a positive one, and if affection and understanding were sometimes lacking, admiration and respect were usually there. In 1905 the widespread belief in constitutional government as the real source of Western power seemed to receive overwhelming confirmation from the Russo-Japanese war, when the whole of Asia saw with delight how a European great power was defeated in war by an Asian state. There were many who did not fail to note the further significant facts that the European great power that was defeated was the only one that still had purely autocratic government, while the Asian power that had inflicted the defeat was the only one that had adopted constitutional and parliamentary government. In defeated Russia, the Tsar granted a form of constitution and convened the first Duma. It was soon

after this that the Persian parliamentary regime was set up, followed after two years by the Revolution of the Young Turks in the Ottoman Empire.

And yet today this great experiment has obviously failed. Though the word 'democracy' still retains enough of its magic to serve as an invocation for many different forms of government, the attempt to introduce and apply the classical West European pattern of freely-elected, multi-party legislative assemblies has been or is being abandoned. The plebiscitary elections and controlled chambers that have replaced them may have precedents and parallels in Europe, but their emergence marks a defeat of the European liberal tradition. One may well ask why this should have happened.

Some causes are obvious. The reforms were precipitate, carried through at far too rapid a pace, without due regard to the conditions in which they were promulgated. They were superimposed from outside, and were irrelevant to events actually occurring in Middle Eastern society at the time. A political system taken over ready-made from another society must fail in many respects to correspond to the different strains and stresses of that to which it is applied. For example, the Belgian constitution works well enough in Belgium, where it is the result of several centuries of Belgian history, and where the Belgian parliament is the apex of a pyramid of responsible elected assemblies which has its base in the Belgian parish and borough councils. But the Belgian constitution translated into Arabic and promulgated in Egypt in 1923 as the Egyptian constitution had far less chance of success. Parliament sat in Cairo, supported and understood by a very limited group of people, but had little connection with life in the villages and even the working-class areas in the towns. The whole political order was unrelated either to the Egyptian past or to the Egyptian present, and was ill-fitted to express Egyptian realities.

In a long period of tranquillity, the peoples of the Middle East might perhaps have succeeded in adapting these borrowed institutions to their own traditions and way of life; but no such period was vouchsafed to them. The pressure of internal and still more of external events left no time or opportunity for experiment and adaptation, and the imported machinery, handled by unskilled operators, broke under the strain or fell into disrepair. Among political leaders the idealism of the first reformers gave way to disappointment, disappointment to frustration, and frustration to a cynicism and opportunism that outraged the moral and religious sense of the Muslim masses and brought the whole concept of democracy into disrepute.

This tide of reaction against Western political institutions met and was swollen by the surging wave of hatred against the West generally. It is our complacent habit in the West to assume that our institutions are in all respects superior to those of Oriental societies, and that any change in those societies in the direction of a greater resemblance to ourselves is necessarily an improvement. In fact it is not always so. Westernisation has brought many great and self-evident benefits to the Middle East—but it has also wrought great injuries, and, human nature being what it is, it is the latter that have received most attention. One of the most important of these is the social and political formlessness of so many oriental countries. In the traditional Islamic society there was an accepted system of social and political functions, loyalties and responsibilities. Admittedly, that system was in decay, as was the whole society—but still it worked and was generally accepted and understood.

Most of the damage was done, not by Western rulers and imperialists, but by hasty and energetic native reformers who carried through their Westernising reforms with a ruthlessness and a precipitancy in striking contrast with the cautious conservatism of most Imperial authorities. In the event, they turned out to have destroyed better than they built. While their western innovations often proved superficial and impermanent, their destruction of the old system of social bonds and obligations was final, and left a gap that has not yet been filled. These changes, and the many economic and social upheavals that accompanied them, have unleashed a great wave of hostility against the West and all that came out of it. In different classes and levels of society it finds different forms of expression, in different areas it is connected with different specific grievances, but for most people it takes the form of a generalised resentment against the alien forces that have dislocated their whole way of life.

Nor can the West disclaim all responsibility. There is a case to be made for and against Imperial rule as a stage in political evolution, and the stability of the states that emerged from the former Indian Empire suggests that the Imperial peace was not without its merits. But there is little that can be said in defence of the half-hearted, pussy-footing imperialism encountered by most of the peoples of the Middle East—an imperialism of interference without responsibility, which would neither create nor permit stable and orderly government.

These difficulties, augmented by the well-known economic upheavals and political grievances of the Middle East, suffice in themselves to explain the failure of a form of government which, as in the nineteenth century, though with the reverse effect, is associated in the public mind with its western countries of origin. But it may be useful to carry our inquiry beyond present circumstances and to try to see how far the nature of Islamic political and social traditions will favour or discourage the eventual emergence of democratic government.

Despite the traces of nomadic freedom surviving in classical Islamic legal theory, the political traditions and experience of Islam are almost entirely autocratic. The citizen owed, as a religious duty, absolute and unquestioning obedience to the sovereign, and had no rights other than that of living the good Muslim life. The sovereign was bound to observe the Holy Law and to make possible the good Muslim life, but apart from that he could do as he pleased. Islamic theory has never recognised any source of authority other than either God or power. The pious regime—that of the Caliph—derives its authority from God. The only alternative source of authority is power—material and effective power, which may however receive a sort of post facto divine approval if the holder of power recognises and maintains the Holy Law. In either case the sole source of authority within the state was the sovereign, who could grant revocable and delegated authority to various persons to carry out his will. All authority was thus personal. Islamic law does not recognise corporate persons, and Islamic history does not show any elected bodies or corporate authorities. Thus there was no state but only a ruler, no court but only a judge, no city but only a conglomeration of families, quarters and guilds.

On the other hand there are certain elements in Islam which provide a possible basis for democratic development. One of these is the traditional tolerance of Islam in both race and religion, which is perhaps one of the cardinal virtues of Islamic society. That does not mean to say that Islam has been entirely free from race prejudice or that it has ever conceded equality to followers of other religions in the Islamic state. Its record however on the whole in these matters is infinitely better than that of any society to the west of it. Even in the greater test of toleration of heresy the record of Islam is extremely good. A striking example is the simultaneous existence of four schools of canonical jurisprudence differing from one another on a number of points but nevertheless recognising one another as orthodox. This method of agreement on fundamentals with a limited measure of

disagreement on matters of detail seems to provide a promising basis for the development of that capacity for cooperation in opposition which is an essential feature of parliamentary government.

Some features of Islamic society which are often adduced by romantics and apologists as 'fundamentally democratic' would probably be better described as equalitarian. There is however a great deal of social democracy in Islam, both in theory and in practice. In the Islamic world from medieval to modern times there has always been a considerable degree of social fluidity, and humble social origin has never been a barrier preventing a man of talent from reaching the highest offices of the State.

The point was vividly made by Adolphus Slade, one of the most perceptive of all Western visitors to the Middle East. In 1831, when Mahmud II had already begun to destroy the old order and prepare the way for the great reforms of the Tanzimat, he wrote:

It is curious to observe the similarity of advantages which are enjoyed by nations in opposite spheres of knowledge, and separated by perfectly distinct manners and religion. Hitherto the Osmanley has enjoyed by custom some of the dearest privileges of freemen, for which Christian nations have so long struggled. He paid nothing to the government beyond a moderate land-tax, although liable, it is true, to extortions, which might be classed with assessed taxes. He paid no tithes, the vacouf sufficing for the maintenance of the ministers of Islamism. He travelled where he pleased without passports; no custom-house officer intruded his eyes and dirty fingers among his baggage; no police watched his motions, or listened for his words. His house was sacred. His sons were never taken from his side to be soldiers, unless war called them. His views of ambition were not restricted by the barriers of birth and wealth: from the lowest origin he might aspire without presumption to the rank of pasha; if he could read, to that of grand vizir; and this consciousness, instilled and supported by numberless precedents, ennobled his mind, and enabled him to enter on the duties of high office without embarrassment. Is not this the advantage so prized by free nations? Did not the exclusion of the people from posts of honour tend to the French revolution?

This kind of freedom and democracy, well-rooted in local tradition, was not increased but reduced by the Westernisation of government. The old and well-tried checks on the Sultan's despotism were one by one abolished; the old intermediate powers of the army, the bureaucracy, the provincial notables and the religious hierarchy were abrogated or enfeebled, leaving the reinforced sovereign power with nothing but the paper shackles of its own edicts to restrain it....

The traditional Islamic kind of social democracy has never found any political expression, and has been greatly impaired by the changes of the last century. It remains however deeply rooted in Muslim sentiment and tradition, and the outrages offered to it are among the most potent causes of the present discontents of Islam. It may yet serve as a basis on which some form of political democracy could be built, though it could equally well be exploited in another direction.

More directly relevant to political life is the Islamic doctrine of the rule of law. The Islamic sovereign though an autocrat, is no true despot. He is not above the law but is subject to the law no less than the humblest of his slaves. It is true that as a restriction on the autocratic powers of the sovereign this is rather theoretical. For one thing the law itself concedes him almost absolute powers; for another the law provides no machinery for its own enforcement against the will of the sovereign. Nevertheless it is broadly true that Islamic sovereigns, with very few exceptions, have maintained the basic principles of the Islamic law at least as far as was required by the public opinion of their time, and respect for law has remained one of the deepest instincts of Islamic society....

Meanwhile, there is a more urgent choice that the peoples of the Middle East are being asked to make, between the Western and Soviet versions of democracy. Which are they likely to choose ?

Despite the hatreds and resentments of recent years, the West still retains tremendous prestige; just as the individual shows or claims membership of the dominant social class by wearing European clothes and shoes, so the well-dressed State with pretensions to modernity must sport a constitution and an assembly chosen by some form of election. Today America offers the Middle East a new model of western democracy, buttressed by the immense wealth, power and prestige of the United States, and free from the

colonial memories that still attach to London and Paris. At first sight the prospects of American-style democracy in the Middle East would seem to be good.

In fact, however, there has been little disposition to follow American practice, and such constitutional and governmental procedures as have been borrowed have come from the southern and not the northern half of the Western hemisphere. Nor are Middle Easterners willing to accept America as something generically different from Europe, and untainted with the European past. For America is still part of that Romance and Germanic, Protestant and Catholic Western Christendom that is the historic West—the millennial adversary of the Islamic Empires, and the source of the devastating impact that has convulsed the Islamic world in modern times. Of this West America is now the conscious leader, and she can no more renounce her association with it than with her language and her culture, her religion and her institutions....

Islam is an independent civilisation, different from both the Western and Communist worlds, and the possibility still remains that the Muslim peoples, recovering at last from the trauma of westernisation, may evolve some form of government within their own tradition.

One thing however must be clear from the start. We must not judge the peoples of other countries entirely by what we feel to be appropriate. The machinery which works well in the West may not work in other countries. Except perhaps in Turkey, our kind of democracy appears to have failed in the Muslim Middle East. But why must we assume that our kind is the only kind? Perhaps in the course of time the peoples of the Middle East will succeed in giving the word democracy a meaning more suited to their own experience, more closely related to their own traditions, more expressive of their own aspirations.

As we have seen, there are antecedents of a kind in Islam for such a development. An elected head of State and the rule of law are familiar. It is true that the first has been purely theoretical, and has not been applied since the days of the first Caliphs in any Islamic State of high material civilisation—but if the doctors of the law of medieval times were able to reduce the electorate to one, there is no reason why their modern heirs should not extend it to a wider suffrage. The Muslim rule of law is theocratic rather than democratic, deriving its authority from the immutable

revelation of God and not from the changing will of the people-but the principle is admitted, and the range of interpretation is vast. Equality and fraternity within the faith-group are accepted and old-established—perhaps it may be possible to extend them beyond it and, adding a redefined liberty, to make a new kind of democracy.

Only ‘the question is’ as Alice remarked, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’



Islam and Communism (1953, excerpt)

I turn now from the accidental to the essential factors, to those deriving from the very nature of Islamic society, tradition, and thought. The first of these is the authoritarianism, perhaps we may even say the totalitarianism, of the Islamic political tradition. It is by now lamentably clear that any totalitarian government, however anti-Communist its professed creed may be, does in fact provide the starting-point for a swift and easy transition to Communist dictatorship. The democratic Finns, isolated and abandoned to the mercies of Russia, have nevertheless succeeded in maintaining their democratic liberties through long and difficult years. The more or less Fascist regimes of Eastern and Central Europe, by a few simple adjustments, were soon transformed into Communist States, for which the machinery and personnel of repression, and the habit of acquiescence in it, were ready to hand. The political experience and traditions of Islam, though very different from those of Eastern Europe, do nevertheless contain elements which might, in certain circumstances, prepare the way for Communism.

Many attempts have been made to show that Islam and democracy are identical—attempts usually based on a misunderstanding of Islam or democracy or both. This sort of argument expresses a need of the uprooted Muslim intellectual who is no longer satisfied with or capable of understanding traditional Islamic values, and who tries to justify, or rather, re-state, his inherited faith in terms of the fashionable ideology of the day. It is an example of the romantic and apologetic presentation of Islam that is a recognized phase in the reaction of Muslim thought to the impact of the

West. There are of course elements, even important elements, in Islam, especially in the early period, which we might not unjustly call democratic, but on the whole the tendency which is usually adduced in support of this thesis is equalitarian rather than democratic; a very different thing, and one that goes with authoritarian at least as well as with democratic institutions. In point of fact, except for the early caliphate, when the anarchic individualism of tribal Arabia was still effective, the political history of Islam is one of almost unrelieved autocracy.

I say autocracy, not despotism, since the sovereign was bound by and subject to the Holy Law, and was accepted by the people as rightful ruler, maintaining and maintained by the authority of the Holy Law. But still, it was authoritarian, often arbitrary, sometimes tyrannical. There are no parliaments or representative assemblies of any kind, no councils or communes, no chambers of nobility or estates, no municipalities in the history of Islam; nothing but the sovereign power, to which the subject owed complete and unwavering obedience as a religious duty imposed by the Holy Law. In the great days of classical Islam this duty was only owed to the lawfully appointed caliph, as God's vicegerent on earth and head of the theocratic community, and then only for as long as he upheld the law; but with the decline of the caliphate and the growth of military dictatorship, Muslim jurists and theologians accommodated their teachings to the changed situation and extended the religious duty of obedience to any effective authority, however impious, however barbarous.

For the last thousand years, the political thinking of Islam has been dominated by such maxims as 'tyranny is better than anarchy' and 'whose power is established, obedience to him is incumbent'. The classical formulation of Islamic political quietism may be found in an often cited passage from the Syrian jurist Ibn Jama'a, who became Chief Qadi of Cairo and died in 1333:

Forced homage. This happens when a chief seizes power by force, in a time of civil disorders, and it becomes necessary to recognize him in order to avoid further troubles. That he may have none of the qualifications of sovereignty, that he be illiterate, unjust or vicious, that he be even a slave or a woman, is of no consequence. He is a sovereign in fact, until such time as another, stronger than he, drives him from the throne and seizes power. He will then be sovereign by the same title, and should be recognized in order not to increase strife. Whoever has effective power has the right to

obedience, for a government, even the worst one, is better than anarchy, and of two evils one should choose the lesser.

It will be clear that these are not the words of a time-server or flatterer trying to make his career at an autocratic court. They are the words of a pious and devout believer, putting bluntly and sadly an unpalatable truth as he sees it. It will be remembered that the writer is a doctor of the Holy Law and speaking in terms of the Holy Law. When he prescribes recognition and obedience, he is laying down the duty of the believer under the Holy Law—that is to say, he is formulating a rule the violation of which is, in our terminology, a sin as well as a crime, involving hell-fire as well as such anticipatory chastisement as the sovereign might see fit to impose in this world. ‘Even a slave or a woman’ says Ibn Jama‘a; only one thing worse can be imagined—an infidel, and that stage too was reached when, after the Norman conquest of Sicily from the Muslims, a Muslim jurist of Mazara laid down that even a Christian ruler must be accepted and obeyed, provided he accords religious toleration to the Muslims. A community brought up on such doctrines will not be shocked by Communist disregard of political liberty or human rights; it may even be attracted by a regime which offers ruthless strength and efficiency in the service of a cause—anyway in appearance—in place of the ineptitude, corruption, and cynicism which in their mind, one may even say in their experience, are inseparable from parliamentary government.

Even the Communist doctrine that the State must direct economic life is not as alien to the Muslim as might be thought—rather is he accustomed to look to the State for direction and control of certain central aspects of economic life. The classical Islamic social order was evolved in Iraq and Egypt, and conformed to the ancient pattern of river-valley society. In those lands of little rainfall there was an intensive agriculture, based on artificial irrigation from the river. This required armies of engineers and officials, employed and controlled by a central authority, whose task it was to maintain the elaborate structure of dykes, dams, canals, and other irrigation works, by which alone the economic life of the country could be maintained. For this system a strong central authority was a paramount necessity, and one does not have to look far to find examples of the ruin and impoverishment which followed the breakdown of the central authority in times of political weakness and the consequent neglect of the irrigation works. In countries blessed with rain the farmer can look to God for his water and maintain a certain independence in other respects. In the river-

valley societies he must look to the central authority to maintain the system and to supply the life-giving stream, and he knows himself to be at its mercy.

It is in such communities that we find the type of social order that Wittfogel has called 'the hydraulic society', where the regime and the ruling class are based on the supply of water for irrigation. Its characteristics are well known: a docile and helpless peasantry, at the mercy of a centralized and bureaucratic authority and a ruling class of officials and land-owners in unchallenged, and indeed unchallengeable, control of the sources of economic life and therefore of political power. The same basic type of society exists in Egypt and Iraq, in the river-valleys of India, in China, and, one may perhaps add, in the river-valleys of Russia. Whether the historic Russian society is 'hydraulic' in this sense I would not pretend to say; there are, however, certain striking similarities. The traditional Islamic autocracy rests on three pillars: the bureaucracy, the army, and the religious hierarchy—and I may recall in passing the interesting suggestion recently made in this Journal by Mr Albert Hourani, that we may be witnessing a return to this pattern in the recent changes in Egypt. In this pattern, only the third, the religious hierarchy, need be changed in order to prepare the way for a Communist State.

That third, however, is by no means unimportant. Quite obviously, the 'Ulama of Islam are very different from the Communist Party. Nevertheless, on closer examination, we find certain uncomfortable resemblances. Both groups profess a totalitarian doctrine, with complete and final answers to all questions on heaven and earth; the answers are different in every respect, alike only in their finality and completeness, and in the contrast they offer with the eternal questioning of Western man. Both groups offer to their members and followers the agreeable sensation of belonging to a community of believers, who are always right, as against an outer world of unbelievers, who are always wrong. Both offer an exhilarating feeling of mission, of purpose, of being engaged in a collective adventure to accelerate the historically inevitable victory of the true faith over the infidel evil-doers. The traditional Islamic division of the world into the House of Islam and the House of War, two necessarily opposed groups, of which the first has the collective obligation of perpetual struggle against the second, also has obvious parallels in the Communist view of world affairs. There again, the content of belief is utterly different, but the aggressive fanaticism of the believer is the same. The humorist who

summed up the Communist creed as ‘There is no God and Karl Marx is his Prophet’ was laying his finger on a real affinity. The call to a Communist Jihad, a Holy War for the faith—a new faith, but against the self-same Western Christian enemy—might well strike a responsive note.

I have referred to collective obligations. Here too there is a possible point of contact between Communism and Islam, the collectivist tendencies of which have struck many observers. A good deal has been written about the innumerable religio-Communist sects and movements that have arisen all over Islam, almost since its beginning. Let me quote from an almost contemporary Arabic chronicle, describing the activities of an agent of one such sect in Iraq, in the neighbourhood of Kufa, about the middle of the ninth century. This agent, we are told, having converted the inhabitants of some villages to his doctrine, imposed on them an ever-increasing series of taxes and levies and finally:

The duty of Ulfa . . .; this consisted of assembling all their goods in one place and enjoying them in common without any one retaining any personal property which might give him an advantage over the others. He assured them that they did not need to keep any property because all the land belonged to them and to no one else. That, he told them, is the test by which you are proved so that we may know how you will behave. He urged them to buy and prepare arms. The missionaries appointed in each village a trustworthy man to assemble all that the people of the village owned by way of cattle, sheep, jewellery, provisions, etc. He clothed the naked and met all their needs, leaving no poor man among them, nor any needy and infirm. Every man worked with diligence and emulation at his task in order to deserve high rank by the benefit he brought. The woman brought what she earned by weaving, the child brought his wages for scaring away birds. Nobody among them owned anything beyond his sword and his arms.

This is no doubt an exaggerated description of the proceedings of these groups, but it is not untypical. And this is but one of many such movements recorded in Islam, and in Persia also long before Islam. All of them failed and were duly condemned by the orthodox as heresy, but they reveal the recurring tendency in Islam to throw up such ideas and groups, and they

also help to explain the otherwise mystifying connexions which are reported from time to time between certain extremist Islamic religious organizations and Communism. It was precisely in organizations of this sort, the popular, semi-secret, mystical brotherhoods, of dubious orthodoxy and mistrusted by the regular 'Ulama, that these religio-Communitistic tendencies usually appeared.

Nor is this collectivism limited to what one might call the 'popular substratum' of Islam. It is also discernible in many aspects of orthodox Islamic life and thought, in the attitude to society and government, which I have already mentioned, even in literature. The classical Arabic book is often presented not as an individual and personal creation of the author, but as a link in the chain of tradition, the author effacing his own personality behind the prestige of authority and the ranks of previous transmitters. Many of the great works of Arabic literature are as impersonal and as collective as a medieval cathedral. This collectivism is perhaps clearest in the Muslim idea of the Perfect Man and the Perfect State as given, immutable patterns externally applied, to which all must in theory attempt to conform by imitation, instead of, as in the Western ideal, by developing their own potentialities from within.

But all this, it may be objected, could equally well be said of any other religion as of Islam, and amounts to no more than saying that Communism is itself a religion. I concede that some of the comparisons I have made, though by no means all, also apply to some other religions. I would add that had these religions retained the same formative and determinative power over their adherents as Islam still has, the observation might have some practical relevance. But I cannot accept the statement that Communism is a religion, and nothing, I would suggest, illustrates more clearly the decayed state of religion in our Western world, than that such a comparison can be made at all.

Admittedly, the resemblances are at first sight striking. In Communism, as in most religions, we find ritual and hierarchy, revelation and prophecy, scripture and exegesis, orthodoxy and heresy, excommunication and persecution. Even some of the deeper spiritual strength of religious faith seems to fortify the true convinced Communist. Despite his professed materialism, he has objectives beyond his own self-interest, and beyond his own lifetime. He is filled with an evangelic fervour and a messianic faith. It is this quality which has given Communism its special strength—the

dangerous fascination which it exercises in so many oriental countries. Fascism and Nazism, with their naked appeal to greed, hate, pride, and envy, could in the long run address themselves only to the evil instincts of man, and were correspondingly limited. Communism, while exploiting these to the full, has also perverted to its service some of the noblest aspirations of the human race—as peace, social justice, the brotherhood of man—and has used them with deadly effect. We shall fail to understand and meet the threat of Communism if we do not recognize its attraction for the best, though not the brightest, as well as for the worst spirits.

Communism thus has many features in common with religion, but those that are lacking are perhaps the most important. I would like to quote a passage from the Danish writer Vilhelm Grønbech, who says:

The trouble is that we confuse religiosity with religion. Just because people are so devout in their personal way, they are unable to conceive a religion which is the soul of society, the obverse of the practical, a living and real religion, the practical relationship of the people to God, soul and eternity, that manifests itself in worship and works as a life-giving power in politics and economics, in crafts and commerce, in ethics as in law. In this sense the modern State has no religion.

In this sense, one may add, Communism is not and cannot be a religion, while Islam, for the great mass of believers, still is; and that is the core of the Islamic resistance to Communist ideas. Though their belief in liberty be too weak to sustain them, their belief in God may yet be strong enough. The Islamic peoples are still profoundly religious in the simplest and deepest meaning of the word. Islam as a religion is no more anti-Communist than Christianity; in fact, as I have suggested, rather less so. But it is more potent as a force affecting the lives and thoughts of its adherents. Pious Muslims—and most Muslims are pious—will not long tolerate an atheist creed, nor one that violates their traditional religious moral principles which, because they do not tally with our own, are too often overlooked by Western observers. The present revolt of the Muslims against the immorality and opportunism of their own and of some Western leaders may temporarily favour the Communists, with their appearance of selfless devotion to an ideal, but will work against Communism when Muslims come to see the realities behind the propaganda. Let us hope that they will not take too long over it.

In any case, there is not a great deal that we can do about it. Our own public and political morality is undoubtedly better than that of the Communists, but the difference is apparently not large enough or striking enough to make any notable impression on the rest of the world. The people who represent Western democracy in its dealings with Islam are certainly estimable men, doing important and meritorious work, but as promoters of moral and religious revival they are unlikely to carry conviction. We of the West can do much to promote the material well-being and raise the material standards of the lands of Islam. We can also perhaps do something to encourage—and that means to justify—a more positive attitude towards ourselves, our ideas, and our aspirations; but in the present crisis it is from within that Islam must find the moral strength and spiritual resources to resist the great secular heresy of our time. We can do no more than refrain from offering impediments.



The Quest for Freedom (1964 as lightly revised in 1994, excerpt)

“Semites,” says T. E. Lawrence, “have no half-tones in their register of vision ... they exclude compromise, and pursue the logic of their ideas to its absurd ends.” That there is something in this, no observer of Middle Eastern affairs can deny. But those who go on to argue that Arabs and other Muslims are necessarily incapable of democratic government are surely guilty of the same kind of absurdity. Some features of traditional Islamic civilization, such as tolerance, social mobility, and respect for law, are distinctly favorable to democratic development. Classical Islam succeeded, as Christendom never really did, in combining religious tolerance with deep religious faith, extending it not only to unbelievers, but also—a far more exacting test—to heretics. The coexistence of differing schools of holy law, all regarded as orthodox, is another example of Islamic tolerance and compromise. Socially, Islam has always been democratic or, rather, egalitarian, rejecting both the caste system of India and the aristocratic privilege of Europe. It needed no revolution to introduce the “career open to the talents” to the Islamic world; it was there from the start, and despite the inevitable tendency to the formation of aristocracies, it was never really eliminated. Islamic theory has always insisted on the supremacy of the law and on the subordination to it of the sovereign. In the Ottoman Empire, the hierarchy of the ulema achieved considerable success in enforcing this

principle. There remained, of course, the political difficulty—the total absence, despite the elective doctrine of the jurists, of any conception or experience of representative or limited government of any kind. It is this, no doubt, that underlies the theory that democracy cannot work in Islamic lands. That there is a predisposition to autocratic government among Muslim peoples is clear enough; that there is an inherent incapacity for any other has yet to be proved.

There is always something disquieting about a hypothesis that presumes a kind of political original sin in human societies. This one is, in any case, unnecessary, for there is enough in the recent history of the Middle East to explain the failure of constitutional democracy, without recourse to political theology. It is easy and tempting for Westerners to adopt an attitude of superiority, contemptuous or tolerant, and to ascribe the breakdown of distinctive Western institutions among other peoples to the lack on their part of some of the West's distinctive virtues. It is easy, but it is not wise, and certainly not helpful. Most Westerners no doubt share the belief that liberal democracy, with all its weaknesses, is the best instrument that any section of the human race has yet devised for the conduct of its political affairs. At the same time, they should remain aware of its local origin and character and try to avoid the primitive arrogance of making their own way of life the universal standard of political morality. "He is a barbarian," says Caesar of Britannus, the British slave, in Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*, "and thinks that the customs of his tribe and island are the laws of nature." Political democracy is a good custom. It has already spread far from its native land and in time will surely spread much farther. It is not, however, a law of nature and in some areas has been tried, found wanting, and abandoned. We must ask why.

In the Middle East, a serious attempt was made to introduce and operate liberal democracy, with written constitutions, elected sovereign parliaments, judicial safeguards, a multitude of parties, and a free press. With few and atypical exceptions, these experiments have failed. In some countries, democratic institutions are in a state of disrepair or collapse; in others, they have already been abandoned, and the search has begun for other paths to the pursuit of happiness.

Today, with the hindsight of history to guide us, we can see many of the causes clearly enough. A political system taken ready-made not merely from another country but from another civilization, imposed by Western or

Westernized rulers from above and from without, could not respond adequately to the strains and stresses of Islamic, Middle Eastern society. Democracy was installed by autocratic decree; parliament sat in the capital, operated and supported by a minute minority whose happy immersion in the new game of parties, programs and politicians was ignored or else watched with baffled incomprehension by the great mass of the people. The result was a political order unrelated to the past or present of the country and irrelevant to the needs of its future. The parliament at Westminster is the result of centuries of history, with its roots in the Anglo-Saxon *witenagemot*; it is the apex of a pyramid of self-governing institutions, with its base at the parish pump. It was evolved by Englishmen on the basis of English experience to meet English needs. The parliament of Cairo was imported in a box, to be assembled and put into use without even a set of do-it-yourself instructions. It responded to no need or demand of the Egyptian people; it enjoyed the backing of no powerful interest or body of opinion.

When a piece of expensive imported machinery falls apart in our hands, we are apt to lay the blame not on our own inexperienced handling, but on the manufacturers and suppliers. The West, which acted in both capacities, has had perhaps more than its fair share of blame for the breakdown of democracy. It cannot, however, wholly disclaim responsibility. One fault was the failure to support adequately those who were its most enthusiastic disciples. Another lies in the mandatory system, which was supposed to provide training in responsibility, but instead gave advanced training in irresponsibility. The position was, if anything, worse in those countries that remained nominally independent, but subject to constant interference. There is a case to be made for as well as against the imperial peace—Persian, Roman, Arab, Turkish, French, or British—as a stage in the development and spread of civilizations. There is little that can be said in defense of the so-called imperialism encountered by the Middle East in the first half of the twentieth century—an imperialism of interference without responsibility, which would neither create nor permit stable and orderly government. Perhaps one of the most significant distinctions in the ex-imperial countries of Asia and Africa is between those that were directly administered through a colonial or imperial civil service and those that were under some form of indirect rule or influence. The people of the latter group of countries got the worst of both worlds, receiving neither the training in administration of the colonial territories nor the practice in responsibility of the old independent states. The system of direct rule, apart

from the useful legacy of an efficient modern bureaucracy, often has the additional merit of clarity. In British India, for example, the transfer of power and responsibility was clear, precise, and unequivocal. Until 15 August 1947, the British were responsible; thereafter, the British ceased to be and the Indians became responsible, and no serious observer has claimed or suspected otherwise. In Algeria, a long and hard-fought war with a decisive result achieved a similar clarity. In Egypt, it would be difficult to agree on the date of the effective transfer of responsibility within half a century. This situation, with its parallels in other Middle Eastern countries, produced a generation of politicians more apt to demand responsibility than to accept it, with a tendency to take refuge from reality that has not entirely died out. This finds expression in an addiction to conspiracy theories: to avoid any serious critical examination of their own societies and even policies and, instead, to place all blame for all evil on former imperial masters and on current enemies, both open and secret. The first at least, forty years after the ending of imperial rule, lacks even minimal plausibility. There are too many leaders who are willing to profit from that most insidious form of Western prejudice that shows itself by expecting and accepting a lower standard of behavior and performance.

There is, of course, more to the question of democratic viability than cultural traditions and political aptitudes. Israel and pre-civil war Lebanon, two of the exceptions to the record of failure, are not only culturally Westernized; they are also relatively well fed, well clothed, and well housed. A small and highly urbanized population in a small area, with good communications and a high standard of education and of living, gives democracy a better chance than do the sprawling impoverished peasant slums that make up a good deal of the rest of the Middle East. After Israel and Lebanon, Turkey has the highest per capita income, the greatest mileage of railway in relation to area, the highest rate of literacy in the Middle East—although Egypt has more industry, more town dwellers, and until recently had more newspaper readers. There would seem to be some correlation between democracy and material progress, but which is the chicken and which is the egg is another question.

This much can be said with reasonable certainty: that many of the social and economic factors that helped make democracy work in other parts of the world are missing in the Middle East, or at least were missing in the crucial period when the experiment was tried. Society was still composed mainly of landlords and peasants. The commercial and industrial middle

class, such as it was, consisted largely of foreigners and members of minorities, who as such were unable to play the classical political and cultural role of the bourgeoisie in Western societies. The new, Muslim professional class of lawyers, journalists, and teachers lacked the economic power and cohesive force to play any really independent role. The industrial working class barely existed; the peasant masses and urban lumpenproletariat were poor, ignorant, and unorganized, still unfitted for participation in political life. In such a society, no new and greater loyalty could arise to transcend the old and intense loyalties to tribe, clan, and family, to sect and guild; no tradition of local cooperation and initiative could develop to break the ancient habits of dependence and acquiescence. The liberals tried and failed, and the parliamentary system passed into the hands of those who controlled wealth and could command or buy obedience. They used it chiefly as an instrument to maintain their own power and to prevent any change or reform that they considered a threat to their interests.

In a long period of tranquillity, the peoples of the Middle East might perhaps have managed to adjust their imported political structures to their own conditions and needs. No such period was allowed to them. Instead, their young and untried democracies were subjected to a series of violent political shocks and stresses, of both internal and external origin, and confronted with the familiar Afro-Asian economic problem of the demographic explosion. In most countries, the parliamentary system collapsed under the strain. All too often, the disappointment and frustration of leaders gave way to a cynicism and opportunism that outraged the moral and religious sense of those whom they professed to lead and brought the whole institution of liberal democracy into disrepute. For the average Egyptian, representative government meant not Westminster or Washington, but Faruq and the pashas, and who could blame him if he rejected and despised it?



Islam and Liberal Democracy (1993, excerpt)

There is an agonizing question at the heart of the present debate about democracy in the Islamic world: Is liberal democracy basically compatible with Islam, or is some measure of respect for law, some tolerance of criticism, the most that can be expected from autocratic governments? The

democratic world contains many different forms of government—republics and monarchies, presidential and parliamentary regimes, secular states and established churches, and a wide range of electoral systems—but all of them share certain basic assumptions and practices that mark the distinction between democratic and undemocratic governments. Is it possible for the Islamic peoples to evolve a form of government that will be compatible with their own historical, cultural, and religious traditions and yet will bring individual freedom and human rights to the governed as these terms are understood in the free societies of the West?

No one, least of all the Islamic fundamentalists themselves, will dispute that their creed and political program are not compatible with liberal democracy. But Islamic fundamentalism is just one stream among many. In the fourteen centuries that have passed since the mission of the Prophet, there have been several such movements—fanatical, intolerant, aggressive, and violent. Led by charismatic religious figures from outside the establishment, they have usually begun by denouncing the perversion of the faith and the corruption of society by the false and evil Muslim rulers and leaders of their time. Sometimes these movements have been halted and suppressed by the ruling establishment. At other times they have gained power and used it to wage holy war, first at home, against those whom they saw as backsliders and apostates, and then abroad against the other enemies of the true faith. In time these regimes have been either ousted or, if they have survived, transformed—usually in a fairly short period—into something not noticeably better, and in some ways rather worse, than the old establishments that they had overthrown. Something of this kind has already happened in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The question, therefore, is not whether liberal democracy is compatible with Islamic fundamentalism—clearly it is not—but whether it is compatible with Islam itself. Liberal democracy, however far it may have traveled, however much it may have been transformed, is in its origins a product of the West—shaped by a thousand years of European history, and beyond that by Europe's double heritage: Judeo-Christian religion and ethics; Greco-Roman statecraft and law. No such system has originated in any other cultural tradition; it remains to be seen whether such a system, transplanted and adapted in another culture, can long survive.

Leaving aside the polemical and apologetic arguments—that Islam, not Western liberalism, is the true democracy, or that Western liberalism itself

derives from Islamic roots—the debate about Islam and liberal democracy has focused on a few major points.

GOD'S POLITY

Every civilization formulates its own idea of good government, and creates institutions through which it endeavors to put that idea into effect. Since classical antiquity these institutions in the West have usually included some form of council or assembly, through which qualified members of the polity participate in the formation, conduct, and, on occasion, replacement of the government. The polity may be variously defined; so, too, may be the qualifications that entitle a member of the polity to participate in its governance. Sometimes, as in the ancient Greek city, the participation of citizens may be direct. More often qualified participants will, by some agreed-upon and recurring procedure, choose some from among their own numbers to represent them. These assemblies are of many different kinds, with differently defined electorates and functions, often with some role in the making of decisions, the enactment of laws, and the levying of taxes.

The effective functioning of such bodies was made possible by the principle embodied in Roman law, and in systems derived from it, of the legal person—that is to say, a corporate entity that for legal purposes is treated as an individual, able to own, buy, or sell property, enter into contracts and obligations, and appear as either plaintiff or defendant in both civil and criminal proceedings. There are signs that such bodies existed in pre-Islamic Arabia. They disappeared with the advent of Islam, and from the time of the Prophet until the first introduction of Western institutions in the Islamic world there was no equivalent among the Muslim peoples of the Athenian boule, the Roman Senate, the Jewish Sanhedrin, the Icelandic Althing or the Anglo-Saxon Witenagemot, or of any of the innumerable parliaments, councils, synods, diets, chambers, and assemblies of every kind that flourished all over Christendom.

One obstacle to the emergence of such bodies was the absence of any legal recognition of corporate persons. There were some limited moves in the direction of recognition. Islamic commercial law recognizes various forms of partnership for limited business purposes. A waqf, a pious foundation, once settled is independent of its settlor and can in theory continue indefinitely, with the right to own, acquire, and alienate property. But these never developed beyond their original purposes, and at no point reached

anything resembling the governmental, ecclesiastical, and private corporate entities of the West.

Thus almost all aspects of Muslim government have an intensely personal character. In principle, at least, there is no state, but only a ruler; no court, but only a judge. There is not even a city with defined powers, limits, and functions, but only an assemblage of neighborhoods, mostly defined by family, tribal, ethnic, or religious criteria, and governed by officials, usually military, appointed by the sovereign. Even the famous Ottoman imperial divan—the *divan-i humayun*—described by many Western visitors as a council, could more accurately be described as a meeting, on fixed days during the week, of high political, administrative, judicial, financial, and military officers, presided over in earlier times by the sultan, in later times by the grand vizier. Matters brought before the meeting were referred to the relevant member of the divan, who might make a recommendation. The final responsibility and decision lay with the sultan or the grand vizier.

One of the major functions of such bodies in the West, increasingly through the centuries, was legislation. According to Muslim doctrine, there was no legislative function in the Islamic state, and therefore no need for legislative institutions. The Islamic state was in principle a theocracy—not in the Western sense of a state ruled by the church and the clergy, since neither existed in the Islamic world, but in the more literal sense of a polity ruled by God. For believing Muslims, legitimate authority comes from God alone, and the ruler derives his power not from the people, nor yet from his ancestors, but from God and the holy law. In practice, and in defiance of these beliefs, dynastic succession became the norm, but it was never given the sanction of the holy law. Rulers made rules, but these were considered, theoretically, as elaborations or interpretations of the only valid law—that of God, promulgated by revelation. In principle the state was God's state, ruling over God's people; the law was God's law; the army was God's army; and the enemy, of course, was God's enemy.

Without legislative or any other kind of corporate bodies, there was no need for any principle of representation or any procedure for choosing representatives. There was no occasion for collective decision, and no need therefore for any procedure for achieving and expressing it, other than consensus. Such central issues of Western political development as the conduct of elections and the definition and extension of the franchise therefore had no place in Islamic political evolution.

Not surprisingly, in view of these differences, the history of the Islamic states is one of almost unrelieved autocracy. The Muslim subject owed obedience to a legitimate Muslim ruler as a religious duty. That is to say, disobedience was a sin as well as a crime.

Modernization in the nineteenth century, and still more in the twentieth, far from reducing this autocracy, substantially increased it. On the one hand, modern technology, communications, and weaponry greatly reinforced the rulers' powers of surveillance, indoctrination, and repression. On the other hand, social and economic modernization enfeebled or abrogated the religious constraints and intermediate powers that had in various ways limited earlier autocracies. No Arab caliph or Turkish sultan of the past could ever have achieved the arbitrary and pervasive power wielded by even the pettiest of present-day dictators.

MONEY AND POWER

The impediments to the development of liberal institutions were not merely political. The small-scale autocracy of the home, especially the upper-class home, founded on polygamy, concubinage, and slavery, was preparation for an adult life of domination and acquiescence, and a barrier to the entry of liberal ideas. Women—particularly the mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters of rulers—have played a much more important role in Muslim history than is usually conceded by historians. But they were until very recently precluded from contributing to the development of their society in the way that a succession of remarkable women have contributed to the flowering of the West.

The economic basis of Western-style liberal democracy was early recognized in the West. British, American, and French democrats alike insisted on the right to property as one of the basic human rights that safeguard and are safeguarded by free institutions. It also forms an essential component of civil society as conceived by European thinkers. For some time the rise of socialist ideas, parties, and governments weakened the belief in private property as a liberal value. Recent events have done much to restore that belief.

Islamic law unequivocally recognizes the sanctity of private property, but Islamic history reveals a somewhat different picture, in which even a rich man's enjoyment of his property has never been safe from seizure or

sequestration by the state. This chronic insecurity is symbolized in the architecture of the traditional Muslim city, in which neighborhoods, and even the houses of the wealthy, are turned inward, surrounded by high blank walls. Marx and Engels themselves recognized that their canonical sequence of ruling classes defined by production relationships might not apply to non-Western societies. They sketched the theory of what they called “the Asiatic mode of production,” in which there was no effective private ownership of land, and consequently no class war—just a simple opposition between the terrorized mass of the population and the all-encompassing state power, bureaucratic and military.

Like many of their other insights, this is a caricature, not a portrait, but also like their other insights, it is not without some basis in reality. Comparing the relationship between property and power in the modern American and classical Middle Eastern systems, one might put the difference this way: in America one uses money to buy power, while in the Middle East one uses power to acquire money. That is obviously an oversimplification, and there are significant exceptions on both sides. The misuse of public office for financial gain is not unknown in the United States; the use of money to buy into the political process is not unfamiliar in the traditional Middle East. But these are marginal, in the main small-scale, departures from the norm. In the vast American political and economic system the money made through the actual exercise of power is relatively unimportant—no more than small-time speculation. In the Middle East money can buy only the power of intrigue, not of command.

Perhaps the most striking manifestation of this difference between the two systems is in the merchant class and its place in the society and polity. Muslim societies, both medieval and early modern, often included a rich and varied industrial and commercial life, and evolved a wealthy and cultivated merchant class. But with brief and insignificant exceptions—as, for example, in a disputed borderland between rival states or in an interregnum between the collapse of one regime and the consolidation of another—they were never able to match the achievement of the rising European bourgeoisie in the creation of the modern West.

One reason is that a large proportion of them were non-Muslims, principally Christians and Jews, and therefore precluded from any decisive role in the political process. But far more important was the chronic,

permanent insecurity, the sequence of upheavals and invasions, the ever-present threat of expropriation or destruction.

These traditional obstacles to democracy have in many ways been reinforced by the processes of modernization and by recent developments in the region. As already observed, the power of the state to dominate and terrorize the people has been vastly increased by modern methods. The philosophy of authoritarian rule has been sharpened and strengthened by imported totalitarian ideologies, which have served a double purpose—to sanctify rulers and leaders and to fanaticize their subjects and followers....

The changes wrought by modernization are by no means entirely negative. Some, indeed, are extremely positive. One such improvement is the emancipation of women. Though this still has a long way to go before it reaches Western levels, irreversible changes have already taken place. These changes are indispensable: a society can hardly aspire realistically to create and operate free institutions as long as it keeps half its members in a state of permanent subordination and the other half see themselves as domestic autocrats. Economic and social development has also brought new economic and social elements of profound importance—a literate middle class, commercial, managerial, and professional, that is very different from the military, bureaucratic, and religious elites that between them dominated the old order. These new groups are creating their own associations and organizations, and modifying the law to accommodate them. They are an indispensable component of civil society—previously lacking, yet essential to any kind of democratic polity.

There are also older elements in the Islamic tradition, older factors in Middle Eastern history, that are not hostile to democracy and that, in favorable circumstances, could even help in its development. Of special importance among these is the classical Islamic concept of supreme sovereignty—elective, contractual, in a sense even consensual and revocable. The Islamic caliphate, as prescribed and regulated by the holy law, may be an autocracy; it is in no sense a despotism. According to Sunni doctrine, the caliph was to be elected by those qualified to make a choice. The electorate was never defined, nor was any procedure of election ever devised or operated, but the elective principle remains central to Sunni religious jurisprudence, and that is not unimportant.

Again according to Sunni doctrine, the relationship between the caliph and his subjects is contractual. The word *bay'a*, denoting the ceremony at the inauguration of a new caliph, is sometimes translated as “homage” or “allegiance.” Such translations, though no doubt reflecting the facts, do not accurately represent the principle. The word comes from an Arabic root meaning “to barter,” hence “to buy and to sell,” and originally referring to the clasping or slapping of hands with which in ancient Arabia a deal was normally concluded. The *bay'a* was thus conceived as a contract by which the subjects undertook to obey and the caliph in return undertook to perform certain duties specified by the jurists. If a caliph failed in those duties—and Islamic history shows that this was by no means a purely theoretical point—he could, subject to certain conditions, be removed from office.

This doctrine marks one of the essential differences between Islamic and other autocracies. An Islamic ruler is not above the law. He is subject to it, no less than the humblest of his servants. If he commands something that is contrary to the law, the duty of obedience lapses and is replaced not by the right but by the duty of disobedience.

Muslim spokesmen, particularly those who sought to find Islamic roots for Western practices, made much of the Islamic principle of consultation, according to which a ruler should not make arbitrary decisions by himself but should act only after consulting with suitably qualified advisers. This principle rests on two somewhat enigmatic passages in the Quran and on a number of treatises, mainly by ulama and statesmen, urging consultation with ulama or with statesmen. This principle has never been institutionalized, nor even formulated in the treatises of the holy law, though naturally rulers have from time to time consulted with their senior officials, more particularly in Ottoman times.

Of far greater importance was the acceptance of pluralism in Islamic law and practice. Almost from the beginning the Islamic world has shown an astonishing diversity. Extending over three continents, it embraced a wide variety of races, creeds, and cultures, which lived side by side in reasonable if intermittent harmony. Sectarian strife and religious persecution are not unknown in Islamic history, but they are rare and atypical, and never reached the level of intensity of the great religious wars and persecutions in Christendom.

Traditional Islam has no doctrine of human rights, the very notion of which might seem an impiety. Only God has rights—human beings have duties. But in practice the duty owed by one human being to another—more specifically, by a ruler to his subjects—may amount to what Westerners would call a right, particularly when the discharge of this duty is a requirement of holy law.

TWO TEMPTATIONS

It may be—and has been—argued that these legal and religious principles have scant effect. The doctrine of elective and contractual sovereignty has been tacitly ignored since the days of the early caliphate. The supremacy of the law has been flouted. Tolerance of pluralism and diversity has dwindled or disappeared in an age of heightened religious, ethnic, and social tensions. Consultation, as far as it ever existed, is restricted to the ruler and his inner circle, while personal dignity has been degraded by tyrants who feel that they must torture and humiliate, not just kill, their opponents.

And yet, despite all these difficulties and obstacles, the democratic ideal is steadily gaining force in the region, and increasing numbers of Arabs have come to the conclusion that it is the best, perhaps the only, hope for the solution of their economic, social, and political problems.

What can we in the democratic world do to encourage the development of democracy in the Islamic Middle East—and what should we do to avoid impeding or subverting it? There are two temptations to which Western governments have all too often succumbed, with damaging results. They might be called the temptation of the right and the temptation of the left.

The temptation of the right is to accept, and even to embrace, the most odious of dictatorships as long as they are acquiescent in our own requirements, and as long as their policies seem to accord with the protection of our own national interests. The spectacle of the great democracies of the West in comfortable association with tyrants and dictators can only discourage and demoralize the democratic opposition in these countries.

The more insidious temptation, that of the left, is to press Muslim regimes for concessions on human rights and related matters. Since ruthless dictatorships are impervious to such pressures, and are indeed rarely subjected to them, the brunt of such well-intentioned intervention falls on

the more moderate autocracies, which are often in the process of reforming themselves in a manner and at a pace determined by their own conditions and needs. The pressure for premature democratization can fatally weaken such regimes and lead to their overthrow, not by democratic opposition but by other forces that then proceed to establish a more ferocious and determined dictatorship.

All in all, considering the difficulties that Middle Eastern countries have inherited and the problems that they confront, the prospects for Middle Eastern democracy are not good. But they are better than they have ever been before. Most of these countries face grave economic problems. If they fail to cope with these problems, then the existing regimes, both dictatorial and authoritarian, are likely to be overthrown and replaced, probably by one variety or another of Islamic fundamentalists. It has been remarked in more than one country that the fundamentalists are popular because they are out of power and cannot be held responsible for the present troubles. If they acquired power, and with it responsibility, they would soon lose that popularity. But this would not matter to them, since once in power they would not need popularity to stay there, and would continue to govern—some with and some without oil revenues to mitigate the economic consequences of their methods. In time even the fundamentalist regimes, despite their ruthless hold on power, would be either transformed or overthrown, but by then they would have done immense, perhaps irreversible, damage to the cause of freedom.

But their victory is by no means inevitable. There is always the possibility that democrats may form governments, or governments learn democracy. The increasing desire for freedom, and the better understanding of what it means, are hopeful signs. Now that the Cold War has ended and the Middle East is no longer a battlefield for rival power blocs, the peoples of the Middle East have the chance—if they can take it—to make their own decisions and find their own solutions. No one else can do it for them. For the first time in centuries, the choice is their own.



Freedom and Justice in the Modern Middle East (2005, excerpt)

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

...In 1798, the French Revolution arrived in Egypt in the form of a small expeditionary force commanded by a young general called Napoleon Bonaparte. The force invaded, conquered, and ruled Egypt without difficulty for several years. General Bonaparte proudly announced that he had come “in the name of the French Republic, founded on the principles of liberty and equality.” This was, of course, published in French and also in Arabic translation. Bonaparte brought his Arabic translators with him, a precaution that some later visitors to the region seem to have overlooked.

The reference to equality was no problem: Egyptians, like other Muslims, understood it very well. Equality among believers was a basic principle of Islam from its foundation in the seventh century, in marked contrast to both the caste system of India to the east and the privileged aristocracies of the Christian world to the west. Islam really did insist on equality and achieved a high measure of success in enforcing it. Obviously, the facts of life created inequalities—primarily social and economic, sometimes also ethnic and racial—but these were in defiance of Islamic principles and never reached the levels of the Western world. Three exceptions to the Islamic rule of equality were enshrined in the holy law: the inferiority of slaves, women, and unbelievers. But these exceptions were not so remarkable; for a long time in the United States, in practice if not in principle, only white male Protestants were “born free and equal.” The record would seem to indicate that as late as the nineteenth or even the early twentieth century, a poor man of humble origins had a better chance of rising to the top in the Muslim Middle East than anywhere in Christendom, including postrevolutionary France and the United States.

Equality, then, was a well-understood principle, but what about the other word Bonaparte mentioned—“liberty,” or freedom? This term caused some puzzlement among the Egyptians. In Arabic usage at that time and for some time after, the word “freedom”—*hurriyya*—was in no sense a political term. It was a legal term. One was free if one was not a slave. To be liberated, or freed, meant to be manumitted, and in the Islamic world,

unlike in the Western world, “slavery” and “freedom” were not until recently used as metaphors for bad and good government.

The puzzlement continued until a very remarkable Egyptian scholar found the answer. Sheikh Rifa‘a Rafi‘ al-Tahtawi was a professor at the still unmodernized al-Azhar University of the early nineteenth century. The ruler of Egypt had decided it was time to try to catch up with the West, and in 1826 he sent a first mission of forty-four Egyptian students to Paris. Sheikh al-Tahtawi accompanied them and stayed in Paris until 1831. He was what might be called a chaplain, there to look after the students’ spiritual welfare and to see that they did not go astray—no mean task in Paris at that time.

During his stay, he seems to have learned more than any of his wards, and he wrote a truly fascinating book giving his impressions of postrevolutionary France. The book was published in Cairo in Arabic in 1834 and in a Turkish translation in 1839. It remained for decades the only description of a modern European country available to the Middle Eastern Muslim reader. Sheikh al-Tahtawi devotes a chapter to French government, and in it he mentions how the French kept talking about freedom. He obviously at first shared the general perplexity about what the status of not being a slave had to do with politics. And then he understood and explained. When the French talk about freedom, he says, what they mean is what we Muslims call justice. And that was exactly right. Just as the French, and more generally Westerners, thought of good government and bad government as freedom and slavery, so Muslims conceived of them as justice and injustice. These contrasting perceptions help shed light on the political debate that began in the Muslim world with the 1798 French expedition and that has been going on ever since, in a remarkable variety of forms.

JUSTICE FOR ALL

As Sheikh al-Tahtawi rightly said, the traditional Islamic ideal of good government is expressed in the term “justice.” This is represented by several different words in Arabic and other Islamic languages. The most usual, *‘adl*, means “justice according to the law” (with “law” defined as God’s law, the Shari‘a, as revealed to the Prophet and to the Muslim community). But what is the converse of justice? What is a regime that does not meet the standards of justice? If a ruler is to qualify as just, as

defined in the traditional Islamic system of rules and ideas, he must meet two requirements: he must have acquired power rightfully, and he must exercise it rightfully. In other words, he must be neither a usurper nor a tyrant. It is of course possible to be either one without the other, although the normal experience was to be both at the same time.

The Islamic notion of justice is well documented and goes back to the time of the Prophet. The life of the Prophet Muhammad, as related in his biography and reflected in revelation and tradition, falls into two main phases. In the first phase, he is still living in his native town of Mecca and opposing its regime. He is preaching a new religion, a new doctrine that challenges the pagan oligarchy that rules Mecca. The verses in the Qur'an, and also relevant passages in the prophetic traditions and biography, dating from the Meccan period, carry a message of opposition—of rebellion, one might even say of revolution, against the existing order.

Then comes the famous migration, the *hijra* from Mecca to Medina, where Muhammad becomes a wielder, not a victim, of authority. Muhammad, during his lifetime, becomes a head of state and does what heads of state do. He promulgates and enforces laws, he raises taxes, he makes war, he makes peace; in a word, he governs. The political tradition, the political maxims, and the political guidance of this period do not focus on how to resist or oppose the government, as in the Meccan period, but on how to conduct government. So from the very beginning of Muslim scripture, jurisprudence, and political culture, there have been two distinct traditions: one, dating from the Meccan period, might be called activist; the other, dating from the Medina period, quietist.

The Qur'an, for example, makes it clear that there is a duty of obedience: "Obey God, obey the Prophet, obey those who hold authority over you." And this is elaborated in a number of sayings attributed to Muhammad. But there are also sayings that put strict limits on the duty of obedience. Two dicta attributed to the Prophet and universally accepted as authentic are indicative. One says, "there is no obedience in sin"; in other words, if the ruler orders something contrary to the divine law, not only is there no duty of obedience but also there is a duty of disobedience. This is more than the right of revolution that appears in Western political thought. It is a duty of revolution, or at least of disobedience and opposition to authority. The other pronouncement, "do not obey a creature against his creator," again clearly limits the authority of the ruler, whatever form of ruler that may be.

These two traditions, the one quietist and the other activist, continue right through the recorded history of Islamic states and Islamic political thought and practice. Muslims have been interested from the very beginning in the problems of politics and government: the acquisition and exercise of power, succession, legitimacy, and—especially relevant here—the limits of authority.

All this is well recorded in a rich and varied literature on politics. There is the theological literature; the legal literature, which could be called the constitutional law of Islam; the practical literature, handbooks written by civil servants for civil servants on how to conduct the day-to-day business of government; and, of course, there is the philosophical literature, which draws heavily on the ancient Greeks, whose work was elaborated in translations and adaptations, creating distinctly Islamic versions of Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics*.

In the course of time, the quietist, or authoritarian, trend grew stronger, and it became more difficult to maintain those limitations on the autocracy of the ruler that had been prescribed by holy scripture and holy law. And so the literature places increasing stress on the need for order. A word used very frequently in the discussions is *fitna*, an Arabic term that can be translated as “sedition,” “disorder,” “disturbance,” and even “anarchy” in certain contexts. The point is made again and again, with obvious anguish and urgency: tyranny is better than anarchy. Some writers even go so far as to say that an hour—or even a moment—of anarchy is worse than a hundred years of tyranny. That is one point of view—but not the only one. In some times and places within the Muslim world, it has been dominant; in others, it has been emphatically rejected.

THEORY VERSUS HISTORY

The Islamic tradition insists very strongly on two points concerning the conduct of government by the ruler. One is the need for consultation. This is explicitly recommended in the Qur'an. It is also mentioned very frequently in the traditions of the Prophet. The converse is despotism; in Arabic *istibdad*, “despotism,” is a technical term with very negative connotations. It is regarded as something evil and sinful, and to accuse a ruler of *istibdad* is practically a call to depose him.

With whom should the ruler consult? In practice, with certain established interests in society. In the earliest times, consulting with the tribal chiefs was important, and it remains so in some places—for example, in Saudi Arabia and in parts of Iraq (but less so in urbanized countries such as Egypt or Syria). Rulers also consulted with the countryside's rural gentry, a very powerful group, and with various groups in the city: the bazaar merchants, the scribes (the nonreligious literate classes, mainly civil servants), the religious hierarchy, and the military establishment, including long-established regimental groups such as the Janissaries of the Ottoman Empire. The importance of these groups was, first of all, that they did have real power. They could and sometimes did make trouble for the ruler, even deposing him. Also, the groups' leaders—tribal chiefs, country notables, religious leaders, heads of guilds, or commanders of the armed forces—were not nominated by the ruler, but came from within the groups.

Consultation is a central part of the traditional Islamic order, but it is not the only element that can check the ruler's authority. The traditional system of Islamic government is both consensual and contractual. The manuals of holy law generally assert that the new caliph—the head of the Islamic community and state—is to be “chosen.” The Arabic term used is sometimes translated as “elected,” but it does not connote a general or even sectional election. Rather, it refers to a small group of suitable, competent people choosing the ruler's successor. In principle, hereditary succession is rejected by the juristic tradition. Yet in practice, succession was always hereditary, except when broken by insurrection or civil war; it was—and in most places still is—common for a ruler, royal or otherwise, to designate his successor.

But the element of consent is still important. In theory, at times even in practice, the ruler's power—both gaining it and maintaining it—depends on the consent of the ruled.

Some critics may point out that regardless of theory, in reality a pattern of arbitrary, tyrannical, despotic government marks the entire Middle East and other parts of the Islamic world. Some go further, saying, “That is how Muslims are, that is how Muslims have always been, and there is nothing the West can do about it.” That is a misreading of history. One has to look back a little way to see how Middle Eastern government arrived at its current state.

The change took place in two phases. Phase one began with Bonaparte's incursion and continued through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when Middle Eastern rulers, painfully aware of the need to catch up with the modern world, tried to modernize their societies, beginning with their governments. These transformations were mostly carried out not by imperialist rulers, who tended to be cautiously conservative, but by local rulers—the sultans of Turkey, the pashas and khedives of Egypt, the shahs of Persia—with the best of intentions but with disastrous results.

Modernizing meant introducing Western systems of communication, warfare, and rule, inevitably including the tools of domination and repression. The authority of the state vastly increased with the adoption of instruments of control, surveillance, and enforcement far beyond the capabilities of earlier leaders, so that by the end of the twentieth century, any tin-pot ruler of a petty state or even of a quasi-state had vastly greater powers than were ever enjoyed by the mighty caliphs and sultans of the past.

But perhaps an even worse result of modernization was the abrogation of the intermediate powers in society—the landed gentry, the city merchants, the tribal chiefs, and others—which in the traditional order had effectively limited the authority of the state. These intermediate powers were gradually weakened and mostly eliminated, so that on the one hand the state was getting stronger and more pervasive, and on the other hand the limitations and controls were being whittled away.

The second stage of political upheaval in the Middle East can be dated with precision. In 1940, the government of France surrendered to Nazi Germany. A new collaborationist government was formed and established in a watering place called Vichy, and General Charles de Gaulle moved to London and set up a Free French committee. The French empire was beyond the reach of the Germans at that point, and the governors of the French colonies and dependencies were free to decide: they could stay with Vichy or rally to de Gaulle. Vichy was the choice of most of them, and in particular the rulers of the French-mandated territory of Syria-Lebanon, in the heart of the Arab East. This meant that Syria-Lebanon was wide open to the Nazis, who moved in and made it the main base of their propaganda and activity in the Arab world.

It was at that time that the ideological foundations of what later became the Ba‘th Party were laid, with the adaptation of Nazi ideas and methods to the Middle Eastern situation. The nascent party’s ideology emphasized pan-Arabism, nationalism, and a form of socialism. The party was not officially founded until April 1947, but memoirs of the time and other sources show that the Nazi interlude is where it began. From Syria, the Germans and the proto-Ba‘athists also set up a pro-Nazi regime in Iraq, led by the famous, and notorious, Rashid ‘Ali al-Gailani.

The Rashid ‘Ali regime in Iraq was overthrown by the British after a brief military campaign in May–June 1941. Rashid ‘Ali went to Berlin, where he spent the rest of the war as Hitler’s guest with his friend the mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini. British and Free French forces then moved into Syria, transferring it to Gaullist control. In the years that followed the end of World War II, the British and the French departed, and after a brief interval, the Soviets moved in.

The leaders of the Ba‘th Party easily switched from the Nazi model to the Communist model, needing only minor adjustments. This was a party not in the Western sense of an organization built to win elections and votes. It was a party in the Nazi and Communist sense, part of the government apparatus particularly concerned with indoctrination, surveillance, and repression. The Ba‘th Party in Syria and the separate Ba‘th Party in Iraq continued to function along these lines.

Since 1940 and again after the arrival of the Soviets, the Middle East has basically imported European models of rule: fascist, Nazi, and Communist. But to speak of dictatorship as being the immemorial way of doing things in that part of the world is simply untrue. It shows ignorance of the Arab past, contempt for the Arab present, and unconcern for the Arab future. The type of regime that was maintained by Saddam Hussein—and that continues to be maintained by some other rulers in the Muslim world—is modern, indeed recent, and very alien to the foundations of Islamic civilization. There are older rules and traditions on which the peoples of the Middle East can build.

CHUTES AND LADDERS

There are, of course, several obvious hindrances to the development of democratic institutions in the Middle East. The first and most obvious is the

pattern of autocratic and despotic rule currently embedded there. Such rule is alien, with no roots in either the classical Arab or the Islamic past, but it is by now a couple of centuries old and is well entrenched, constituting a serious obstacle.

Another, more traditional hurdle is the absence in classical Islamic political thought and practice of the notion of citizenship, in the sense of being a free and participating member of a civic entity. This notion, with roots going back to the Greek *polites*, a member of the *polis*, has been central in Western civilization from antiquity to the present day. It, and the idea of the people participating not just in the choice of a ruler but in the conduct of government, is not part of traditional Islam. In the great days of the caliphate, there were mighty, flourishing cities, but they had no formal status as such, nor anything that one might recognize as civic government. Towns consisted of agglomerations of neighborhoods, which in themselves constituted an important focus of identity and loyalty. Often, these neighborhoods were based on ethnic, tribal, religious, sectarian, or even occupational allegiances. To this day, there is no word in Arabic corresponding to “citizen.” The word normally used on passports and other documents is *muwatin*, the literal meaning of which is “compatriot.” With a lack of citizenship went a lack of civic representation. Although different social groups did choose their own leaders during the classical period, the concept of choosing individuals to represent the citizenry in a corporate body or assembly was alien to Muslims’ experience and practice.

Yet, other positive elements of Islamic history and thought could help in the development of democracy. Notably, the idea of consensual, contractual, and limited government is again becoming an issue today. The traditional rejection of despotism, of *istibdad*, has gained a new force and a new urgency: Europe may have disseminated the ideology of dictatorship, but it also spread a corresponding ideology of popular revolt against dictatorship.

The rejection of despotism, familiar in both traditional and, increasingly, modern writings, is already having a powerful impact. Muslims are again raising—and in some cases practicing—the related idea of consultation. For the pious, these developments are based on holy law and tradition, with an impressive series of precedents in the Islamic past. One sees this revival particularly in Afghanistan, whose people underwent rather less modernization and are therefore finding it easier to resurrect the better traditions of the past, notably consultation by the government with various

entrenched interests and loyalty groups. This is the purpose of the Loya Jirga, the “grand council” that consists of a wide range of different groups—ethnic, tribal, religious, regional, professional, and others. There are signs of a tentative movement toward inclusiveness in the Middle East as well.

There are also other positive influences at work, sometimes in surprising forms. Perhaps the single most important development is the adoption of modern communications. The printing press and the newspaper, the telegraph, the radio, and the television have all transformed the Middle East. Initially, communications technology was an instrument of tyranny, giving the state an effective new weapon for propaganda and control.

But this trend could not last indefinitely. More recently, particularly with the rise of the Internet, television satellites, and cell phones, communications technology has begun to have the opposite effect. It is becoming increasingly clear that one of the main reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union was the information revolution. The old Soviet system depended in large measure on control of the production, distribution, and exchange of information and ideas; as modern communications developed, this became no longer possible. The information revolution posed the same dilemma for the Soviet Union as the Industrial Revolution did for the Ottoman and other Islamic empires: either accept it and cease to exist in the same manner or reject it and fall increasingly behind the rest of the world. The Soviets tried and failed to resolve this dilemma, and the Russians are still struggling with the consequences.

A parallel process is already beginning in the Islamic countries of the Middle East. Even some of the intensely and unscrupulously propagandist television programs that now infest the airwaves contribute to this process, indirectly and unintentionally, by offering a diversity of lies that arouse suspicion and questioning. Television also brings to the peoples of the Middle East a previously unknown spectacle—that of lively and vigorous public disagreement and debate. In some places, young people even watch Israeli television. In addition to seeing well-known Israeli public figures “banging the table and screaming at each other” (as one Arab viewer described it with wonderment), they sometimes see even Israeli Arabs arguing in the Knesset, denouncing Israeli ministers and policies—on Israeli television. The spectacle of a lively, vibrant, rowdy democracy at work, notably the unfamiliar sight of unconstrained, uninhibited, but

orderly argument between conflicting ideas and interests, is having an impact.

Modern communications have also had another effect, in making Middle Eastern Muslims more painfully aware of how badly things have gone wrong. In the past, they were not really conscious of the differences between their world and the rest. They did not realize how far they were falling behind not only the advanced West but also the advancing East—first Japan, then China, India, South Korea, and Southeast Asia—and practically everywhere else in terms of standard of living, achievement, and, more generally, human and cultural development. Even more painful than these differences are the disparities between groups of people in the Middle East itself.

Right now, the question of democracy is more pertinent to Iraq than perhaps to any other Middle Eastern country. In addition to the general factors, Iraq may benefit from two characteristics specific to its circumstances. One relates to infrastructure and education. Of all the countries profiting from oil revenues in the past decades, pre-Saddam Iraq probably made the best use of its revenues. Its leaders developed the country's roads, bridges, and utilities, and particularly a network of schools and universities of a higher standard than in most other places in the region. These, like everything else in Iraq, were devastated by Saddam's rule. But even in the worst of conditions, an educated middle class will somehow contrive to educate its children, and the results of this can be seen in the Iraqi people today.

The other advantage is the position of women, which is far better than in most places in the Islamic world. They do not enjoy greater rights—"rights" being a word without meaning in that context—but rather access and opportunity. Under Saddam's predecessors, women had access to education, including higher education, and therefore to careers, with few parallels in the Muslim world. In the West, women's relative freedom has been a major reason for the advance of the greater society; women would certainly be an important, indeed essential, part of a democratic future in the Middle East.

FUNDAMENTAL DANGERS

The main threat to the development of democracy in Iraq and ultimately in other Arab and Muslim countries lies not in any inherent social quality or

characteristic, but in the very determined efforts that are being made to ensure democracy's failure. The opponents of democracy in the Muslim world come from very different sources, with sharply contrasting ideologies. An alliance of expediency exists between different groups with divergent interests.

One such group combines the two interests most immediately affected by the inroads of democracy—the tyranny of Saddam in Iraq and other endangered tyrannies in the region—and, pursuing these parallel concerns, is attempting to restore the former and preserve the latter. In this the group also enjoys some at least tacit support from outside forces—governmental, commercial, ideological, and other—in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere, with a practical or emotional interest in its success.

Most dangerous are the so-called Islamic fundamentalists, those for whom democracy is part of the greater evil emanating from the West, whether in the old-fashioned form of imperial domination or in the more modern form of cultural penetration. Satan, in the Qur'an, is "the insidious tempter who whispers in men's hearts." The modernizers, with their appeal to women and more generally to the young, are seen to strike at the very heart of the Islamic order—the state, the schoolroom, the market, and even the family. The fundamentalists view the Westerners and their dupes and disciples, the Westernizers, as not only impeding the predestined advance of Islam to final triumph in the world, but even endangering it in its homelands. Unlike reformers, fundamentalists perceive the problem of the Muslim world to be not insufficient modernization, but an excess of modernization—and even modernization itself. For them, democracy is an alien and infidel intrusion, part of the larger and more pernicious influence of the Great Satan and his cohorts.

The fundamentalist response to Western rule and still more to Western social and cultural influence has been gathering force for a long time. It has found expression in an increasingly influential literature and in a series of activist movements, the most notable of which is the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928. Political Islam first became a major international factor with the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The word revolution has been much misused in the Middle East and has served to designate and justify almost any violent transfer of power at the top. But what happened in Iran was a genuine revolution, a major change with a very significant

ideological challenge, a shift in the basis of society that had an immense impact on the whole Islamic world, intellectually, morally, and politically.

The theocratic regime in Iran swept to power on a wave of popular support nourished by resentment against the old regime, its policies, and its associations. Since then, the regime has become increasingly unpopular as the ruling mullahs have shown themselves to be just as corrupt and oppressive as the ruling cliques in other countries in the region. There are many indications in Iran of a rising tide of discontent. Some seek radical change in the form of a return to the past; others, by far the larger number, place their hopes in the coming of true democracy. The rulers of Iran are thus very apprehensive of democratic change in Iraq, the more so as a majority of Iraqis are Shi'ites, like the Iranians. By its mere existence, a Shi'ite democracy on Iran's western frontier would pose a challenge, indeed a mortal threat to the regime of the mullahs, so they are doing what they can to prevent or deflect it.

Of far greater importance at the present are the Sunni fundamentalists. An important element in the Sunni holy war is the rise and spread—and in some areas dominance—of Wahhabism. Wahhabism is a school of Islam that arose in Nejd, in central Arabia, in the eighteenth century. It caused some trouble to the rulers of the Muslim world at the time but was eventually repressed and contained. It reappeared in the twentieth century and acquired new importance when the House of Saud, the local tribal chiefs committed to Wahhabism, conquered the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and created the Saudi monarchy.

The first great triumph of the Sunni fundamentalists was the collapse of the Soviet Union, which they saw—not unreasonably—as their victory. For them the Soviet Union was defeated not in the Cold War waged by the West, but in the Islamic jihad waged by the guerrilla fighters in Afghanistan. As Osama bin Ladin and his cohorts have put it, they destroyed one of the two last great infidel superpowers—the more difficult and the more dangerous of the two. Dealing with the pampered and degenerate Americans would, so they believed, be much easier. American actions and discourse have at times weakened and at times strengthened this belief.

In a genuinely free election, fundamentalists would have several substantial advantages over moderates and reformers. One is that they speak a

language familiar to Muslims. Democratic parties promote an ideology and use a terminology mostly strange to the “Muslim street.” The fundamentalist parties, on the other hand, employ familiar words and evoke familiar values both to criticize the existing secularist, authoritarian order and to offer an alternative. To broadcast this message, the fundamentalists utilize an enormously effective network that meets and communicates in the mosque and speaks from the pulpit. None of the secular parties has access to anything comparable. Religious revolutionaries, and even terrorists, also gain support because of their frequently genuine efforts to alleviate the suffering of the common people. This concern often stands in marked contrast with the callous and greedy unconcern of the current wielders of power and influence in the Middle East. The example of the Iranian Revolution would seem to indicate that once in power these religious militants are no better, and are sometimes even worse, than those they overthrow and replace. But until then, both the current perceptions and the future hopes of the people can work in their favor.

Finally, perhaps most important of all, democratic parties are ideologically bound to allow fundamentalists freedom of action. The fundamentalists suffer from no such disability; on the contrary, it is their mission when in power to suppress sedition and unbelief.

Despite these difficulties, there are signs of hope, notably the Iraqi general election in January. Millions of Iraqis went to polling stations, stood in line, and cast their votes, knowing that they were risking their lives at every moment of the process. It was a truly momentous achievement, and its impact can already be seen in neighboring Arab and other countries. Arab democracy has won a battle, not a war, and still faces many dangers, both from ruthless and resolute enemies and from hesitant and unreliable friends. But it was a major battle, and the Iraqi election may prove a turning point in Middle Eastern history no less important than the arrival of General Bonaparte and the French Revolution in Egypt more than two centuries ago.

FEAR ITSELF

The creation of a democratic political and social order in Iraq or elsewhere in the Middle East will not be easy. But it is possible, and there are increasing signs that it has already begun. At the present time there are two fears concerning the possibility of establishing a democracy in Iraq. One is

the fear that it will not work, a fear expressed by many in the United States and one that is almost a dogma in Europe; the other fear, much more urgent in ruling circles in the Middle East, is that it will work. Clearly, a genuinely free society in Iraq would constitute a mortal threat to many of the governments of the region, including both Washington's enemies and some of those seen as Washington's allies.

The end of World War II opened the way for democracy in the former Axis powers. The end of the Cold War brought a measure of freedom and a movement toward democracy in much of the former Soviet domains. With steadfastness and patience, it may now be possible at last to bring both justice and freedom to the long-tormented peoples of the Middle East.



Double Standards (excerpt from *The Crisis of Islam*, 2003)

Increasingly in recent decades, Middle Easterners have articulated a more sensitive complaint, a new grievance against American policy: not just American complicity with imperialism or with Zionism but something nearer home and more immediate—American complicity with the corrupt tyrants who rule over them. For obvious reasons, this particular complaint does not often appear in public discourse, nor is it likely to be mentioned in conversations between foreign ministry officials and diplomats. Middle Eastern governments, such as those of Iraq, Syria, and the Palestine Authority, have developed great skill in controlling their own media and manipulating those of Western countries. Nor, for equally obvious reasons, is it raised in diplomatic negotiation. But it is discussed, with increasing anguish and urgency, in private conversations with listeners who can be trusted, and recently even in public—and not only by Islamic radicals, for whom it is a, indeed the, major issue. Interestingly, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 was one time when this resentment was expressed openly. The shah was accused of supporting America, but America was also attacked for imposing what the revolutionaries saw as an impious and tyrannical leader as its puppet. In the years that followed, Iranians discovered that pious tyrants could be as bad as impious tyrants or worse, and that this brand of tyranny could not be blamed on foreign sponsors or models.

There is some justice in one charge that is frequently leveled against the United States, and more generally against the West: Middle Easterners increasingly complain that the West judges them by different and lower standards than it does Europeans and Americans, both in what is expected of them and in what they may expect, in terms of their economic well-being and their political freedom. They assert that Western spokesmen repeatedly overlook or even defend actions and support rulers that they would not tolerate in their own countries.

Relatively few in the Western world nowadays think of themselves as engaged in a confrontation with Islam. But there is nevertheless a widespread perception that there are significant differences between the advanced Western world and the rest, notably the peoples of Islam, and that these latter are in some ways different, with the usually tacit assumption that they are inferior. The most flagrant violations of civil rights, political freedom, even human decency are disregarded or glossed over, and crimes against humanity, which in a European or American country would invoke a storm of outrage, are seen as normal and even acceptable. Regimes that practice such violations are not only tolerated, but even elected to the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations, whose members include Saudi Arabia, Syria, Sudan, and Libya.

The implication of all this is that these peoples are incapable of running a democratic society and have neither concern nor capacity for human decency. They will in any case be governed by corrupt despotisms. It is not the West's business to correct them, still less to change them, but merely to ensure that the despots are friendly rather than hostile to Western interests. In this perspective it is dangerous to tamper with the existing order, and those who seek better lives for themselves and their countrymen are disparaged, often actively discouraged. It is simpler, cheaper, and safer to replace a troublesome tyrant with an amenable tyrant, rather than face the unpredictable hazards of regime change, especially of a change brought about by the will of the people expressed in a free election.

The "devil-you-know" principle seems to underlie the foreign policies of many Western governments toward the peoples of the Islamic world. This attitude is sometimes presented and even accepted as an expression of sympathy and support for the Arabs and their causes, apparently in the belief that by exempting Arab rulers and leaders from the normal rules of

civilized behavior we are somehow conferring a boon on the Arab peoples. In fact this exemption is nothing of the kind, being at the very best a quest for a temporary alliance based on a shared self-interest and directed against a common enemy, sometimes also sustained by a shared prejudice. At a more profound level of reality, it is an expression of disrespect and unconcern—disrespect for the Arab past, unconcern for the Arab present and future.

This approach commands some support in both diplomatic and academic circles in the United States and rather more widely in Europe. Arab rulers are thus able to slaughter tens of thousands of their people, as in Syria and Algeria, or hundreds of thousands, as in Iraq and Sudan, to deprive men of most and women of all civil rights, and to indoctrinate children in their schools with bigotry and hatred against others, without incurring any significant protest from liberal media and institutions in the West, still less any hint of punishments such as boycotts, divestment, or indictment in Brussels. This so-to-speak diplomatic attitude toward Arab governments has in reality been profoundly harmful to the Arab peoples, a fact of which they are becoming painfully aware.

As many Middle Easterners see it, the European and American governments' basic position is: "We don't care what you do to your own people at home, so long as you are cooperative in meeting our needs and protecting our interests."

Sometimes, even where American interests are concerned, American governments have betrayed those whom they had promised to support and persuaded to take risks. A notable example occurred in 1991, when the United States called on the Iraqi people to revolt against Saddam Hussein. The Kurds in northern Iraq and the Shi'a in southern Iraq did so, and the victorious United States forces sat and watched while Saddam Hussein, using the helicopters that the cease-fire agreement had allowed him to retain, bloodily suppressed and slaughtered them, group by group and region by region.

The reasoning behind this action—or rather inaction—is not difficult to see. No doubt, the victorious Gulf War coalition wanted a change of government in Iraq, but they had hoped for a coup d'état, not a revolution. They saw a genuine popular uprising as dangerous—it could lead to uncertainty or even anarchy in the region. It might even produce a democratic state, an

alarming prospect for America's "allies" in the region. A coup would be more predictable and could achieve the desired result: the replacement of Saddam Hussein by another, more cooperative dictator, who could take his place among those allies in the coalition. This policy failed completely, and was variously interpreted in the region as treachery or weakness, foolishness or hypocrisy.

Another example of this double standard occurred in the Syrian city of Hama in 1982. The troubles in Hama began with an uprising headed by the radical Muslim Brothers. The Syrian government responded swiftly, and in force. They did not use water cannon and rubber bullets, nor did they send their soldiers to face snipers and booby traps in house-to-house searches to find and identify their enemies among the local, civil population. Their method was simpler, safer, and more expeditious. They attacked the city with tanks, artillery, and bomber aircraft, and followed these with bulldozers to complete the work of destruction. Within a very short time they had reduced a large part of the city to rubble. The number killed was estimated, by Amnesty International, at somewhere between ten thousand and twenty-five thousand.

The action, which was ordered and supervised by the Syrian president, Hafiz al-Assad, attracted little attention at the time. This meager response was in marked contrast with that evoked by another massacre, a few months later in the same year, in the Palestinian refugee camps in Sabra and Shatila, in Lebanon. On that occasion, some seven or eight hundred Palestinians were massacred by a Lebanese Christian militia allied to Israel. This evoked powerful and widespread condemnation of Israel, which has reverberated to the present day. The massacre in Hama did not prevent the United States from subsequently courting Assad, who received a long succession of visits from American Secretaries of State James Baker (eleven times between September 1990 and July 1992), Warren Christopher (fifteen times between February 1993 and February 1996), and Madeline Albright (four times between September 1997 and January 2000), and even from President Clinton (one visit to Syria and two meetings in Switzerland between January 1994 and March 2000). It is hardly likely that Americans would have been so eager to propitiate a ruler who had perpetrated such crimes on Western soil, with Western victims. Hafiz al-Assad never became an American ally or, as others would put it, puppet, but it was certainly not for lack of trying on the part of American diplomacy.

Fundamentalists were conscious of a different disparity—another no less dramatic case of double standards. Those whose slaughter in Hama aroused so little concern in the West were Muslim Brothers and their families and neighbors. In Western eyes, so it appeared, human rights did not apply to pious Muslim victims, nor democratic constraints to their “secular” murderers.

Western mistrust of Islamic political movements, and willingness to tolerate or even support dictators who kept such movements out of power appeared even more dramatically in the case of Algeria, where a new democratic constitution was adopted by referendum in February 1989 and the multiparty system officially established in July of that year. In December 1991, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) did very well in the first round of the elections for the National Assembly and seemed more than likely to win a clear majority in the second round. The FIS had already challenged the Algerian military, accusing them of being more adept at repressing their own people than at helping a brother in need. The brother in need was Saddam Hussein, whose invasion of Kuwait and defiance of the West aroused great enthusiasm among Muslim fundamentalists in North Africa, and persuaded their leaders to transfer their allegiance from their Saudi sponsors to their new Iraqi hero. In January 1992, after an interval of growing tension, the military canceled the second round of elections. In the months that followed they dissolved the FIS and established a “secular” regime, in fact a ruthless dictatorship, with nods of approval in Paris, Washington, and other Western capitals. A bitter and murderous struggle followed, with reciprocal accusations of massacre—of fundamentalists by the army and other less formal instruments of the government, of secularists and modernists and uninvolved bystanders by the fundamentalists. In 1997 Amnesty International assessed the number of victims since the beginning of the struggle at eighty thousand, most of them civilians.

Al-Qa‘ida has held the United States explicitly responsible for the military takeover in Algeria. Here as elsewhere America, as the dominant power in the world of the infidels, was naturally blamed for all that went wrong, and more specifically for the suppression of Islamist movements, the slaughter of their followers, and the establishment of what were seen as anti-Islamist dictatorships with Western—more specifically, American—support. Here too the Americans were blamed—by many for not protesting this violation of democratic liberties, by some for actively encouraging and supporting the military regime. Similar problems arise in Egypt, in Pakistan, and in

some other Muslim countries where it seems likely that a genuinely free and fair election would result in an Islamist victory.

In this, the democrats are of course at a disadvantage. Their ideology requires them, even when in power, to give freedom and rights to the Islamist opposition. The Islamists, when in power, are under no such obligation. On the contrary, their principles require them to suppress what they see as impious and subversive activities.

For Islamists, democracy, expressing the will of the people, is the road to power, but it is a one-way road, on which there is no return, no rejection of the sovereignty of God, as exercised through His chosen representatives. Their electoral policy has been classically summarized as “One man (men only), one vote, once.”

Clearly, in the Islamic world as it was in Europe, a free and fair election is the culmination, not the inauguration, of the process of democratic development. But that is no reason to cosset dictators.



Islam and the West: A Conversation with Bernard Lewis (excerpt, 2006)

MASSIMO CALABRESI, TIME: In your description of Sharia law, you also indicated it had some transnational primacy. You described the contrast of a nation divided into religions with a religion divided into nations. Religion is the primary identity, you said, for followers of Islam around the world. The question is simply, how realistic a policy of spreading democracy in the Islamic world is it at this point?

LEWIS: A lot of things are being said about Islam now. There is a view, for example, that could be summed up this way: These people are incapable of decent, civilized, open government. Whatever we do, they will be ruled by corrupt tyrants, therefore, the only aim of foreign policy should be to ensure that they are friendly tyrants rather than hostile tyrants. We know versions of this approach produced well-known results in Central America, in Southeast Asia, and other places.

I would say that this is a totally false approach because to say that they are incapable of anything else is simply a falsification of history. What we have now come to regard as typical of Middle Eastern regimes is not typical of the past. The regime of Saddam Hussein, the regime of Hafiz al Assad, this kind of government, this kind of society, has no roots either in the Arab or in the Islamic past. It is due—and let me be quite specific and explicit—it is due to an importation from Europe, which comes in two phases.

Phase one, the 19th century, when they are becoming aware of their falling behind the modern world and need desperately to catch up, so they adopt all kinds of European devices with the best of intentions, which nevertheless have two harmful effects. One, they enormously strengthen the power of the state by placing in the hands of the ruler, weaponry and communication undreamt of in earlier times, so that even the smallest petty tyrant has greater powers over his people than Harun al-Rashid or Suleyman the Magnificent, or any of the legendary rulers of the past.

Second, even more deadly, in the traditional society there were many, many limits on the autocracy, the ruler. The whole Islamic political tradition is strongly against despotism. Traditional Islamic government is authoritarian, yes, but it is not despotic. On the contrary, there is a quite explicit rejection of despotism. And this wasn't just in theory; it was in practice too because in Islamic society, there were all sorts of established orders in society that acted as a restraining factor. The bazaar merchants, the craft guilds, the country gentry and the scribes, all of these were well organized groups who produced their own leaders from within the group. They were not appointed or dismissed by the governments. And they did operate effectively as a constraint.

There is a wonderful quote I like to use; it is the letter written in 1786 by the French ambassador in Istanbul—three years before the French Revolution. He is trying to explain why he is not making good progress with his assignment. And he says, here things are not as in France, where the king is sole master and does as he pleases; here the sultan has to consult with all kinds of people, with all kinds of holders of office, and even with retired, former holders of office. And it's true; that is how it was. All of that disappeared with the process of modernization, which, as I say,

strengthened the government and weakened or eliminated the previous limiting factors.

The second, really deadly phase came—and here I can date it precisely—in the year 1940. In 1940, the government of France decided to surrender and, in effect, changed sides in the war. The greater part of the colonial empire was beyond the reach of the Axis, and the governors therefore had a free choice: Vichy or de Gaulle. The overwhelming majority chose Vichy, including—and this is what concerns us specifically—the governor, high commissioner, he was called, of the French-mandated territory of Syria-Lebanon. So, Syria-Lebanon was wide open to the Nazis, and they moved in on a large scale, not with troops, because that would have been too noticeable, but with propaganda of every kind. It was then that the roots of Ba'athism were laid, and the first organizations were formed, which ultimately developed into the Ba'ath Party.

It was then that the Nazi style of ideology and government became known, eagerly embraced simply because it was anti-Western rather than because of inherent attraction. From Syria, they succeeded in spreading it to Iraq, where they even set up a Nazi-style government for a while, headed by Rashid Ali. It was possible to deal with that, and they were driven out of the Middle East. But after the war, the Western allies also left, and the Soviets moved in, taking the place of the Nazis as a champion against the West. To switch from the Nazi to the communist model required only minor adjustments.

This is not part of the historic Arab or Islamic tradition and, for that reason, I think that the prospect, not of our creating democratic institutions, but of allowing them to develop their own democratic institutions, is definitely a possibility. I would go a step further. I think we could have done much more than we have done, and I think that it's still not a lost cause, but it is now becoming very much endangered. And if they go on, if we help them, there have been many signs of a developing democratic movement not only in Iraq, where the news is much better than you would think, but also in Iran, in Syria and in other places—stirrings of popular democratic movements—Egypt, for example, and North Africa and elsewhere.

The movement is there. It is dangerous to say or do such things, so they have to be very careful, but it's there, it's growing, and there is a lot we

could do that we are not doing to help them. And what are the alternatives? As far as I can see, there are many possibilities; let me give you the worst-case and best-case scenarios and you can work out the intermediate possibilities. My worst-case scenario is that Europe, and possibly also the rest of the West, and the Islamic world destroy each other, and the future belongs, or is contested between, India and China as the superpowers of the second half of the 21st century. My best case scenario is that, somehow, with our help, or at least without our hindrance, the peoples of the Middle East succeed in developing open, democratic societies, in which case the Middle East would be able to resume its rightful place, which it has had twice before, in world civilization....

JANE LITTLE, BBC: Professor Lewis, you mentioned there's a debate happening now about the need for a separation of church and state in Islam. I'm wondering where you see that debate being the most vibrant and whether Islamic thinkers, largely living in the West, really can influence the emergence of some form of Islamic secular democracy, and how far you really believe that the discussions about the compatibility of Islam and democracy drawing on Islamic concepts of *shura* consultation. How realistic do you believe that is, whether we're thinking of democracy in our own image here?

LEWIS: It doesn't have to be in our own image. I don't see why we should assume that what is variously known as the Westminster model or the Jeffersonian model should apply here universally. I think that trying to impose our kind of democracy is foredoomed to failure. What I think one may reasonably hope for is that they will be able to develop some form of democratic government of their own. There are certain principles that are enshrined in the holy law of Islam—for example, the principle of limited and responsible government. That is part of the holy law. The government is limited and the law says obey; the Quran says obey those who hold authority over you, but the law also says—and this is a tradition ascribed to the Prophet—there is no obedience in sin. That means, if the ruler commands something that is sinful, not only is there no duty of obedience, there is a duty of disobedience, which is more than the right of disobedience we have in Western thought.

There are many other examples of that. There is the contractual element. According to traditional Muslim law, the head of the state is the caliph, and

the caliphs are being chosen and appointed—it goes through a procedure that is called, in Arabic, the *bay'a*. This is usually translated as “homage,” but it is a mistranslation. The word *bay'a* in Arabic does not mean homage. It comes from a root meaning to buy and sell. In other words, it's a deal, a contract. The *bay'a* is a contract agreed between the ruler and those who appointed him ruler, which imposes duties on both.

So, limited, contractual, consensual government is part of the Islamic tradition, and was a living part of it until the process of modernization came and destroyed everything. Therefore, I think we have a good chance of getting back to that. But we must be realistic. As I say, they must develop their own form of limited, moderate, contractual, consensual government. What they don't have, which is an essential part of ours, is the idea of elected representation. They have representation in the sense of the leader of a group, who comes from within the group, but the idea of elections on the corporate bodies is new; and this is difficult, but not impossible....

MICHAEL HIRSH, NEWSWEEK: What should we be doing specifically that's different from what the Bush administration has been doing regarding confrontation with the Iranian regime? I also just wanted to pick up on something you said earlier and ask you to elaborate, because you also issued a warning earlier in your remarks about your fear that we might be betraying the people of the Middle East, the Arab countries. In what way do you fear we might be doing that? That too seemed to contain an implied criticism of current administration policy.

LEWIS: What can one do? Now, as I said before, I don't think it's a good idea to launch an armed invasion. There is a great deal one can do short of that to indicate displeasure, to make things difficult and to encourage resistance among the subjects of the Iranian government. And there is ample evidence of widespread unhappiness and discontent among the people of Iran. I think we could do more to encourage and help them in a number of ways.

MODERATOR: And that may perhaps connect to your second question, which is in what way might we be betraying the people of the Middle East?

LEWIS: Betraying them by doing what we are often accused of doing, and that is, making friends of tyrants and having tyrants as our puppets and not

worrying about the suppression of their people. This is an accusation that is frequently made concerning many of the rulers of the region, and while it is often exaggerated, it is not by any means entirely baseless....

Coming back to Iraq, obviously the situation has been getting worse over time, but I think it is still salvageable. We now have a political process going on, and I think if one looks at the place and what's been happening there, one has to marvel at what has been accomplished. There is an old saying, no news is good news, and the media obviously work on the reverse principle: Good news is no news. Most of the good things that have happened have not been reported, but there has been tremendous progress in many respects. Three elections were held—three fair elections in which millions of Iraqis stood in line waiting to vote and knowing they were risking their lives every moment that they did so. And all this wrangling that's going on now is part of the democratic process, the fact that they argue, that they negotiate, that they try to find a compromise. This is part of their democratic education.

So I find all this both annoying and encouraging. I see that more and more people are becoming involved in the political process. And there's one thing in Iraq in particular that I think is encouraging, and that is the role of women. Of all the Arab countries, with the possible exception of Tunisia, Iraq is the one where women have made most progress. I'm not talking about rights, a word that has no meaning in that context. I'm talking about opportunity, access. Women in Iraq had access to education, to higher education, and therefore to the professions, and therefore to the political process to a degree without parallel elsewhere in the Arab world, as I said, with the possible exception of Tunisia. And I think that the increasing participation of women is a very encouraging sign for the development of democratic institutions.

I would quote Atatürk, who began his career as a politician in 1923 by making a series of speeches demanding political rights for women. Now, at first glance it would be difficult to imagine anything more improbable than an Ottoman pasha and a general beginning his political career on a feminist program, but that's exactly what he did, and he gave a good reason for it. He said, with his usual terseness and clarity, "Our most urgent task today is to catch up with the modern world." He said, "We will not catch up with the

modern world if we only modernize half the population.” “We” meaning Turkey, of course. Simple, clear and, I think, overwhelmingly true.

And I think the same is true in the Arab world today, and that’s why I think this is one of the more encouraging factors in Iraq, where women have done better than in most other places, and I think women will play an increasingly important role in the Iraqi political society.

Explanatory Notes

- **p. 7 — Hellenistic monarchies** — Kingdoms that arose after the conquests of Alexander the Great, especially the Seleucid and Ptolemaic states. They combined Greek political culture with older Near Eastern traditions of centralized monarchy.
- **p. 7 — Second Turkish attempt to capture Vienna (1683)** — The Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683, whose failure marked the beginning of a long period of Ottoman military reverses against European powers.
- **p. 7 — Peter the Great** — Peter I (1672–1725), tsar of Russia, who undertook sweeping military and administrative reforms intended to bring Russia closer to Western European models.
- **p. 7 — Encyclopédie** — The great French Enlightenment encyclopedia edited principally by Denis Diderot and Jean d’Alembert and published between 1751 and 1772. It disseminated Enlightenment ideas about reason, science, religion, and government.
- **p. 8 — Grand Vizier** — The Ottoman Empire’s chief minister and, for long periods, the principal executive official beneath the sultan.
- **p. 8 — Bayrakdar Mustafa Pasha** — Ottoman grand vizier in 1808 who attempted to strengthen central government and revive the reform program of Sultan Selim III. He was killed during a Janissary revolt later that year.
- **p. 8 — Muhammad Ali Pasha** — Ottoman governor of Egypt from 1805 and founder of the dynasty that ruled Egypt until 1952. He created a highly centralized administration and modernized army.
- **p. 8 — Sultan Abdülmecid** — Ottoman sultan Abdülmecid I (r. 1839–1861), under whom the major *Tanzimat* reform program began.
- **p. 8 — Bey of Tunis** — The hereditary ruler of Ottoman Tunisia. By the nineteenth century the beys exercised extensive autonomy from Istanbul.
- **p. 8 — Khedive Isma‘il** — Isma‘il Pasha, ruler of Egypt from 1863 to 1879. The Ottoman title *khedive* signified the semi-autonomous hereditary ruler of Egypt.
- **p. 9 — Persian Constitutional Revolution** — Iranian movement of 1905–1911 that compelled the shah to grant a constitution and establish an elected parliament, the *Majlis*.

- **p. 9 — mandatory governments** — Governments established under League of Nations mandates after World War I, principally British rule in Iraq and Palestine and French rule in Syria and Lebanon.
- **p. 9 — Sadullah Pasha** — Ottoman diplomat, statesman, and intellectual (1838–1891), associated with the Westernizing reformist elite of the late Ottoman Empire.
- **p. 9 — Paris Exhibition of 1878** — The *Exposition Universelle*, a large international exhibition in Paris displaying industrial, technological, artistic, and cultural achievements.
- **p. 10 — vicegerent** — A person exercising authority as the representative or deputy of a higher power; here, the ruler conceived as exercising authority on behalf of God.
- **p. 10 — Russo-Japanese War** — War of 1904–1905 in which Japan defeated the Russian Empire. The victory had enormous symbolic importance because an Asian power had defeated a major European state.
- **p. 10 — Duma** — The elected legislative assembly created in the Russian Empire after the Revolution of 1905.
- **p. 10 — Young Turks** — Ottoman constitutionalist movement that forced Sultan Abdülhamid II to restore the constitution in 1908. The Committee of Union and Progress subsequently became the empire’s dominant political organization.
- **p. 11 — plebiscitary elections** — Elections or referendums used primarily to obtain popular endorsement of an existing ruler or regime rather than to permit genuine political competition.
- **p. 11 — Belgian Constitution of 1831** — A liberal European constitution establishing a constitutional monarchy, parliamentary government, and civil liberties; it influenced constitutional experiments elsewhere, including Egypt.
- **p. 12 — “imperial peace”** — The relative order and stability imposed over large territories by an imperial power; comparable to expressions such as *Pax Romana* or *Pax Britannica*.
- **p. 12 — “pussy-footing”** — An older colloquial expression meaning timid, evasive, or excessively cautious.
- **p. 13 — post facto** — Latin: “after the fact”; here, legitimacy or approval conferred after power has already been seized.

- **p. 13 — corporate person** — An organization legally recognized as possessing rights and obligations independent of its individual members; corporations, municipalities, churches, and universities are examples.
- **p. 13 — four schools of canonical jurisprudence** — The four major Sunni schools of Islamic law: Hanafī, Maliki, Shafi‘i, and Hanbali. Each developed somewhat different legal methods and rulings while recognizing the others as legitimate Sunni traditions.
- **p. 14 — equalitarian** — Favoring social equality. Lewis distinguishes social equality from political democracy.
- **p. 14 — Adolphus Slade** — British naval officer and writer (1804–1877) who spent many years in Ottoman service as Müşavir Pasha and became an unusually knowledgeable European observer of Ottoman institutions.
- **p. 14 — Mahmud II** — Ottoman sultan (r. 1808–1839) who destroyed the Janissary corps in 1826 and initiated major military and administrative centralization.
- **p. 14 — Tanzimat** — Ottoman reform era conventionally dated from 1839 to 1876, marked by administrative centralization, legal reforms, military modernization, and efforts to redefine the relationship between the state and its subjects.
- **p. 14 — Osmanley** — Older European rendering of *Osmanlı*, meaning Ottoman.
- **p. 14 — vacouf** — *Waqf*: a charitable or religious endowment whose revenues were legally dedicated to purposes such as mosques, schools, hospitals, or poor relief.
- **p. 14 — pasha** — High Ottoman civil or military title.
- **p. 14 — grand vizir** — Older spelling of grand vizier, the Ottoman chief minister.
- **p. 16 — Romance and Germanic** — The two broad linguistic-cultural families Lewis invokes to describe Western Europe: Romance peoples whose languages derive from Latin, and Germanic peoples speaking languages such as English, German, and Dutch.
- **p. 16 — Western Christendom** — Historical term for the Latin Christian civilization of Western and Central Europe, traditionally associated with the Roman Catholic Church and, after the Reformation, Protestant churches as well.

- **p. 16 — “doctors of the law”** — Learned Muslim jurists and scholars qualified to interpret Islamic law; not medical doctors.
- **p. 17 — “as Alice remarked”** — Reference to Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass*, in which Humpty Dumpty discusses whether words can be made to mean whatever a speaker chooses.
- **p. 18 — early caliphate** — Usually the period of the first four caliphs after Muhammad, known in Sunni tradition as the Rashidun or “Rightly Guided” Caliphs, 632–661.
- **p. 18 — political quietism** — The view that subjects should refrain from rebellion or active political opposition, often because disorder and civil war are considered worse than unjust rule.
- **p. 18 — Ibn Jama‘a** — Badr al-Din Ibn Jama‘a (1241–1333), Syrian-Egyptian jurist and political thinker who served as chief *qadi* of Cairo.
- **p. 18 — Chief Qadi** — Senior Muslim judge; *qadi* means a judge administering Islamic law.
- **p. 19 — Mazara** — Town in western Sicily. Lewis refers to a Muslim jurist writing after the Norman Christian conquest of formerly Muslim Sicily.
- **p. 19 — Norman conquest of Sicily** — Eleventh-century conquest of Muslim-ruled Sicily by Norman Christian forces, completed in 1091.
- **p. 20 — Wittfogel** — Karl August Wittfogel (1896–1988), historian and political sociologist whose theory of “hydraulic society” associated large irrigation systems with powerful centralized bureaucratic states.
- **p. 20 — hydraulic society** — Wittfogel’s term for a society in which control of large-scale irrigation and water management contributes to centralized bureaucratic power.
- **p. 20 — Albert Hourani** — Albert Habib Hourani (1915–1993), prominent British historian of the modern Middle East and author of *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*.
- **p. 20 — ‘Ulama** — Muslim religious scholars, especially specialists in Islamic law and theology.
- **p. 20 — House of Islam / House of War** — English renderings of *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb*, classical juridical categories distinguishing territory under Muslim rule from territory outside it.

- **p. 21 — Kufa** — Early Islamic city in present-day Iraq and an important political, religious, and intellectual center.
- **p. 21 — Ulfa** — Literally “familiarity,” “affection,” or social solidarity. Lewis quotes a medieval account that uses the term for a communal pooling of property among members of a sectarian movement.
- **p. 23 — Vilhelm Grønbech** — Vilhelm Grønbech (1873–1948), Danish historian of religion and culture.
- **p. 24 — T. E. Lawrence** — Thomas Edward Lawrence (1888–1935), British officer and writer known as “Lawrence of Arabia” for his role in the Arab Revolt during World War I.
- **p. 24 — “career open to the talents”** — Phrase associated with the French Revolution and Napoleon, signifying advancement by ability rather than hereditary social rank.
- **p. 25 — “political original sin”** — Lewis’s metaphor for the claim that a society possesses some inherited, nearly ineradicable defect making democracy impossible.
- **p. 25 — Caesar and Britannus** — Characters in George Bernard Shaw’s play *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898); Britannus is Caesar’s British secretary.
- **p. 26 — witenagemot** — Anglo-Saxon royal council composed of leading nobles and churchmen; literally “meeting of wise men.” It is sometimes treated as a distant predecessor of the English Parliament.
- **p. 26 — parish pump** — Figurative British expression for very local government and community affairs.
- **p. 26 — mandatory system** — The League of Nations mandate system created after World War I, under which former German and Ottoman territories were administered by victorious powers supposedly in preparation for eventual self-government.
- **p. 28 — bourgeoisie** — The property-owning commercial and professional middle class; in European history, often associated with the rise of capitalism and demands for constitutional government.
- **p. 28 — lumpenproletariat** — Marxist term for impoverished and socially marginal people outside the organized industrial working class.
- **p. 28 — Faruq** — King Farouk of Egypt (r. 1936–1952), deposed by the Free Officers in the July 1952 revolution.

- **p. 30 — legal person** — An entity, such as a corporation or municipality, treated by law as capable of possessing rights and duties separate from its individual members.
- **p. 30 — Athenian boule** — Council of citizens in ancient Athens, especially the Council of Five Hundred, which prepared business for the citizen assembly.
- **p. 30 — Sanhedrin** — Jewish council and judicial body of antiquity, particularly associated with Jerusalem during the Second Temple and Roman periods.
- **p. 30 — Althing** — Iceland’s historic national assembly, traditionally founded around AD 930 and often described as one of the world’s oldest parliamentary institutions.
- **p. 30 — Witenagemot** — See p. 26 above.
- **p. 30 — synod** — Formal council or assembly of church officials.
- **p. 30 — diet** — In historical European usage, a representative or deliberative political assembly, such as the Imperial Diet of the Holy Roman Empire.
- **p. 30 — waqf** — A permanent charitable or religious endowment recognized under Islamic law.
- **p. 30 — settlor** — Person who establishes a trust or endowment and transfers property into it.
- **p. 31 — divan-i humayun** — The Ottoman Imperial Council, composed of the empire’s highest political, military, judicial, and financial officials and normally presided over by the grand vizier.
- **p. 31 — franchise** — The legal right to vote.
- **p. 32 — concubinage** — A recognized domestic relationship in which a man cohabits with a woman of subordinate legal status without marriage; in premodern Islamic societies it was often associated with slavery.
- **p. 33 — sequestration** — Legal or governmental seizure or taking control of property.
- **p. 33 — Marx and Engels** — Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), founders of Marxist theory.

- **p. 33 — Asiatic mode of production** — A category used intermittently by Marx and later Marxists for societies supposedly characterized by communal landholding, large public works, and a dominant centralized state rather than European-style private landed property and class relations.
- **p. 33 — bourgeoisie** — The commercially and economically independent middle class; Lewis emphasizes its political role in European constitutional development.
- **p. 33 — interregnum** — A period between rulers or regimes during which normal political authority is interrupted.
- **p. 33 — peculation** — Embezzlement or theft of public money by an official.
- **p. 35 — bay‘a** — Formal pledge acknowledging a Muslim ruler. Lewis stresses the word’s linguistic connection with buying and selling to interpret it as implying a reciprocal contract.
- **p. 35 — consultation** — Usually associated with the Arabic *shura*: the principle that a ruler should consult appropriate members of the community or knowledgeable advisers before acting.
- **p. 36 — human rights as “impiety”** — Lewis means that classical Islamic legal discourse normally framed obligations as duties imposed by God rather than as autonomous rights possessed by individuals against divine law.
- **p. 36 — “temptation of the right” / “temptation of the left”** — Lewis’s labels for two Western policy errors: supporting friendly dictators for strategic reasons, and pushing imperfectly liberalizing regimes toward reforms so rapidly that more extreme forces may replace them.
- **p. 38 — hurriyya** — Arabic for freedom or liberty. Lewis notes that historically its principal legal meaning was the condition of being free rather than enslaved.
- **p. 38 — manumitted** — Legally freed from slavery.
- **p. 39 — Rifa‘a Rafi‘ al-Tahtawi** — Egyptian scholar and reformer (1801–1873) who lived in Paris from 1826 to 1831 and became an influential interpreter of European institutions and ideas for Arabic readers.

- **p. 39 — al-Azhar University** — Ancient center of Islamic learning in Cairo, founded in the tenth century and one of the most influential institutions of Sunni scholarship.
- **p. 39 — ‘adl** — Arabic for justice, especially justice in accordance with law.
- **p. 40 — hijra** — Muhammad’s migration from Mecca to Medina in 622, the event from which the Islamic calendar is traditionally dated.
- **p. 40 — quietist / activist** — Lewis’s distinction between traditions emphasizing obedience and political order and traditions legitimating resistance to unjust authority.
- **p. 41 — fitna** — Arabic term with meanings including trial, discord, sedition, civil strife, and rebellion. In political writing it often evokes the destructive danger of internal disorder.
- **p. 41 — istibdad** — Arabic for despotism or arbitrary autocratic rule, carrying strongly negative connotations in modern Arabic political thought.
- **p. 42 — bazaar merchants** — Merchants and shopkeepers centered in the traditional urban marketplace; in some Middle Eastern societies they formed an economically powerful and socially organized constituency.
- **p. 42 — scribes** — Literate administrative personnel, clerks, and officials; Lewis uses the word for the nonreligious educated bureaucratic class.
- **p. 42 — Janissaries** — Elite Ottoman infantry corps that became a powerful corporate and political force before Sultan Mahmud II destroyed it in 1826.
- **p. 43 — pashas and khedives of Egypt** — *Pasha* was a high Ottoman title; *khedive* became the title of Egypt’s hereditary rulers from the Muhammad Ali dynasty.
- **p. 43 — shahs of Persia** — Monarchs of Iran; *shah* is the Persian word for king.
- **p. 43 — “tin-pot ruler”** — Derogatory expression for a petty dictator who exercises grandiose or arbitrary authority despite governing a relatively weak state.

- **p. 43 — Vichy** — Spa town in central France that became the seat of the authoritarian French government headed by Marshal Philippe Pétain after France’s defeat by Nazi Germany in 1940.
- **p. 43 — Free French** — Movement led by Charles de Gaulle that rejected the Vichy regime and continued fighting alongside the Allies during World War II.
- **p. 44 — Ba‘th Party** — Arab nationalist and socialist movement formally founded in Syria in 1947. Rival Ba‘thist regimes later ruled Syria and Iraq.
- **p. 44 — Rashid ‘Ali al-Gailani** — Iraqi politician who headed the anti-British government established after the 1941 coup in Iraq and subsequently fled to Nazi Germany.
- **p. 44 — Haj Amin al-Husseini** — Palestinian Arab political and religious leader (c. 1895–1974), grand mufti of Jerusalem, who collaborated with Nazi Germany during World War II.
- **p. 45 — polites / polis** — Greek *polites* means citizen; *polis* means city-state or civic community.
- **p. 45 — muwatin** — Modern Arabic term for citizen, derived from *watan*, homeland or country. Lewis notes its literal association with being a fellow member of the same homeland.
- **p. 46 — Loya Jirga** — Pashto for “grand assembly,” a traditional Afghan gathering of tribal, regional, religious, and other leaders convened to deliberate on major national questions.
- **p. 46 — Knesset** — Israel’s elected national parliament.
- **p. 48 — “Great Satan”** — Term famously used by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the Islamic Republic of Iran for the United States.
- **p. 48 — Muslim Brotherhood** — Sunni Islamist movement founded in Egypt by Hasan al-Banna in 1928. It became one of the Arab world’s most influential Islamist organizations.
- **p. 49 — Wahhabism** — Islamic reform movement originating in eighteenth-century central Arabia with Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Its alliance with the House of Saud became foundational to the Saudi state.
- **p. 49 — Nejd** — Najd, the central plateau region of the Arabian Peninsula and original heartland of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance.

- **p. 49 — Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union** — Armed resistance by Afghan *mujahidin* against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, 1979–1989, supported by Pakistan, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and others.
- **p. 50 — “Muslim street”** — Journalistic shorthand for popular opinion among ordinary Muslims, especially when contrasted with official governmental views.
- **p. 50 — Iraqi general election in January** — The January 30, 2005 Iraqi election, the first nationwide election after the 2003 overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Voters chose a Transitional National Assembly.
- **p. 51 — Axis powers** — Germany, Italy, Japan, and their allies during World War II.
- **p. 51 — Palestine Authority** — The Palestinian Authority, established in the 1990s under the Oslo agreements to exercise limited self-government in parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
- **p. 52 — UN Human Rights Commission** — United Nations body responsible for human-rights issues until it was replaced by the Human Rights Council in 2006.
- **p. 52 — “devil-you-know” principle** — From the saying “better the devil you know than the devil you don’t”: preference for a familiar, predictable bad ruler over uncertain political change.
- **p. 53 — 1991 Iraqi uprisings** — Kurdish and Shiite rebellions against Saddam Hussein immediately after Iraq’s defeat in the Gulf War. Iraqi forces crushed both uprisings after the U.S.-led coalition chose not to intervene directly on the rebels’ behalf.
- **p. 54 — Hama, 1982** — Syrian government suppression of an uprising led by the Muslim Brotherhood in the city of Hama. Syrian forces devastated sections of the city and killed many thousands of people.
- **p. 54 — Hafiz al-Assad** — President of Syria from 1971 to 2000 and father of Bashar al-Assad.
- **p. 54 — Sabra and Shatila** — Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut where a Lebanese Christian militia massacred hundreds of Palestinians in September 1982 while Israeli forces controlled the surrounding area.
- **p. 54 — James Baker / Warren Christopher / Madeleine Albright** — U.S. secretaries of state under Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill

Clinton: Baker (1989–1992), Christopher (1993–1997), and Albright (1997–2001).

- **p. 55 — Islamic Salvation Front (FIS)** — Algerian Islamist political party that appeared poised to win parliamentary elections in 1991–92 before the military canceled the electoral process.
- **p. 55 — Algerian civil war** — Violent conflict during the 1990s between the Algerian government and various Islamist armed groups following cancellation of the 1991–92 elections; perhaps 100,000 or more people were killed.
- **p. 56 — “One man, one vote, once”** — Polemical formula expressing the fear that an antidemocratic movement might use a free election to gain power and then abolish further free elections.
- **p. 57 — Harun al-Rashid** — Abbasid caliph (r. 786–809), later idealized in *The Thousand and One Nights* as an emblem of the splendor and power of the early Abbasid caliphate.
- **p. 57 — Suleyman the Magnificent** — Suleiman I (r. 1520–1566), Ottoman sultan under whom the empire reached a high point of military power and territorial extent.
- **p. 57 — bazaar merchants / craft guilds / country gentry / scribes** — Social groups Lewis presents as possessing enough corporate cohesion and independent standing in traditional Middle Eastern society to place practical limits on rulers.
- **p. 58 — Vichy or de Gaulle** — Choice confronting French colonial officials after France’s 1940 defeat: recognize the collaborationist Vichy government of Marshal Pétain or join Charles de Gaulle’s Free French movement.
- **p. 58 — French Mandate of Syria-Lebanon** — League of Nations mandate administered by France after World War I over territories corresponding broadly to modern Syria and Lebanon.
- **p. 59 — shura** — Arabic for consultation; an Islamic principle invoked by some modern writers as a possible indigenous foundation for consultative or representative government.
- **p. 59 — Westminster model** — British system of parliamentary government in which the executive derives from and is responsible to the legislature.

- **p. 59 — Jeffersonian model** — Here, shorthand for the American liberal-democratic tradition associated with Thomas Jefferson, emphasizing popular government, individual liberty, and representative institutions.
- **p. 60 — bay‘a** — See p. 35 above: the formal pledge between ruler and those recognizing his authority, which Lewis interprets as contractual rather than merely ceremonial.
- **p. 61 — Atatürk** — Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), founder and first president of the Republic of Turkey, who introduced sweeping secularizing, legal, educational, and social reforms after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.