

Is Democracy Possible in the Middle East?

It is a highly charged question that has prompted years of scholarly debate. The bigger question after what is called “Arab Spring” is, Is Democracy achievable? If it's, how can we achieve it? And if not possible, should we live with the current authoritarian system?

In 2011, all that appeared to change, as popular uprisings swept across Arab nations. Starting in Tunisia, the Arab Spring unseated dictators in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, and triggered protests in Bahrain, Syria, Jordan, and Morocco. The idea of crowds ousting dictators was unthinkable, but as it happened across the Arab world, became not just a possibility but reality.

But what happened next, tell a lot about the Middle East cultures, where we ignore, deny, or even disbelieve. That culture which was built over many years in our mind, heart, thought and soles.

Two years later, Libya and Yemen, which both unseated their respective dictators, are chaotic and anarchic. Syria is in the throes of a bloody civil war. Bahrain's government continues to brutally suppress protesters. Tunisia and Egypt were the two countries that held up possible positive examples of democratic transition, end up with discontent with the Islamist-led governments. In Egypt, the new wave of crowds gathered in Tahrir Square again to cheer the fall of what suppose to be democratically elected president Morsi, who was ousted by the army. Egypt's abrupt turnaround suggested the final death knell for the Arab Spring and for hopes of democracy in the Middle East.

The most obvious observation during the process was the economic support of democracy movement in the Middle East. Those peaceful demonstrators, as started, turned into militant activities, were supported by undemocratic countries, backed up by the US and EU support, and all of that under the umbrella of DEMOCRACY. Qatar and Saudi Arabia was the two obvious supporter of the arm movement in Syria. That demonstrated the depth of the division between Muslims, when Sunni and Shiite's obvious disagreements over decades rise to become the reason for a long war between the two sides. Some also suggest that the west had a role to play, including maintaining instability in the Middle East to keep the oil region under their influence and to stay the one who control the world. That strategy suddenly faced by the Russian-China coalition, where they felt

they have to show the west and US, how important player they are, and how they have to be respected and considered in any future calculation of world control. That led to make Syria the battle ground for the new Cold bloody war between the two side of the conflict, while Syrian's people fell into the trap of democratic concept, something we never had or never lived, and even never understood.

Some argue that democracy may be incompatible with Middle Eastern values and many other reasons, while some argue that no matter what, the Middle East deserve these democratic changes, even if the price is too expensive to pay, because the future of the new generation is what we should think about.

Let's analyze the most common reasons for the difficulties of democracy in the Middle East:

Education:

Is Democracy possible when 40-50% of the populations do not know how to read or write? We consider education is the unbreakable base for democracy, should be taught in schools to future generation, so when they have it, they understand it and believe in it. The current Social media democracy, as I define it, will not have the power of survival, because the people who believe in it, doing it for personal gain, they see the Western Culture as an example, something they deserve, and they have the right for it, but they are not able to answer the question of how to develop it? How to maintain it? And how to fight for it?

Social:

Obedience / Respect: The social system in the Middle east is based on "yes Sir" concept, where Islam as a dominant religion, and since prophet Mohammed announce Islam, Muslim's deems obedience to the Ul'il Amr obligatory **"O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority (Ulul-Amr) from among you (min kum)."** (Qur'an 4:5.9)

Thus he has imposed on us obedience to those in authority that is those who have command over us.

As part of that cultural understanding, we are raised to obey our parents, no matter what, and dictatorship starts in our families, where we have to

live according to our parent choices. We go to school and colleges, and find ourselves obeying teachers and principles, because its part of the curriculum to succeed. We go into army, as part of mandated arm services, we have to obey our superiors, and that rules has no appeal whatsoever. We move into marriages, and most Muslim's still believe that women, wife's has to obey their husband no matter what. Then the cycle continue with our children's and go on.

Poverty: The economic status of most of the people in the Middle East is less than the middle class, and the population dependency on government support, in providing jobs, make most of the people support the government and dictators strategy because of " No choice concept" but also keep the people busy, looking for their sources of financial support to their families, and have no time to think about politics, right and wrong, democracy or dictators. If the west understand the Middle east, and Saudi wants to do something good for the Arab world, they will support economic development instead of war, because that will give the people power to care for freedom in the future instead of finding food to their kids as more important than any freedom.

Poverty also was the main reason for those fundamentalist to rise, where ISIS providing young, unemployed men with money and clothes, where they find this alternative a solution to support their families who are struggling with the war and lack of their daily needs. If the west, Saudi's and Qatar, did not make getting rid of individual a priority, and made changes toward better life a priority, that could shift their financial support to go toward the Syrian population instead of ISIS, who is using that to attract more members. God is the only one who knows how or where they will end up.

Self Serving / Glory: the Middle Eastern, and Muslim's in general like to feel the power of themselves, they like to show off, do things only to show others that they are more powerful or better economically. The sad part that to achieve that, they willing to violate any roles, even pampering politics, dictators, and leaders, and that led to tie most people to the system, where they are part of it, so it's illogical to change the things you want and like. The Middle East people, they made dictators by their association or fear, and both ways, we are the people who brought them to power and maintain them in power, so lets be realistic in our demands, because people are part of the problem, even though I believe we are the problem.

Wars and Israel: What is really underestimated in many ways is the strong feeling in the Middle East about wars, Israel, and how armies are not only needed but also necessary to guarantee survival of the Arab and Islam. This feeling, which occupies the heart and mind of many Arabs and Muslim's, unite them behind their armies, where they believe they are the defenders, and in that case they look at their military leaders as heroes' and find them rising them to become their ultimate dictator after that. If the world, the west, and US in specific understand this factors, and try to eliminate by forcing peace, supporting peace, instead of supporting one side against the other, leading to the flare up of feeling against the state itself, and allowing a more power to those dictators, to use the concept for more power and control on their own people.

Religion:

Is democracy possible without having religious influence in the Middle East? The Middle East religious belief still the dominant controlling system, and even what is called democracy movement, was only led by religious organization, who survived under the ground during the dictatorship governments, they had the support of the public in general, because they used Islam, and some of the social activities, like supporting the poor, and providing shelters to anti government people, but the most important, because of the religion, where they got the financial support from countries who considered them the future alternative to continue the Rise of Islam. That is what Qatar and Saudi Arabia did with Muslim Brotherhood.

The sad part, that as soon as they came to power, as it happened in Egypt, they considered themselves the only democracy to survive, moving things toward religious dictatorship, and that led to the removal of Morsi in Egypt, the new election in Tunisia, and the new developed civil war in Libya.

The worse comes when those religious movement did not get their ways, they turn into militant move, supported by many Muslim's, who believe that all of the action is against Islam, and that Jihad should be the path for them to survive. That led to the bloody war in Syria, where religion became the excuse for killing, destruction, and bloodshed. That does not minimize from the government role in the blame of continuing this bloodshed.

The division we mentioned earlier between Muslim's magnified this religious factor, by having deeper division based on 1500 years of inaccurate arguments between Islamic fractions, and when religious

leaders find their glory with new rulings and Fatwa's, promoting further killing for the sake of god "Allah", and the sake of Islamic state. We find ourselves witnessing the most dangerous and scary time of our life, heading people, spreading hate, destroying countries, and all of that to start the new Caliphate's. Where the war now is not only between Muslim's, but expands to include Christian's and Jewish.

With the development of these new unliked organization, people start talking about new democracy; I will call it " Democracy except for Muslim's" suggesting that democracy is OK as long no Muslims or similar organizations are involved, this is what is called "democracy of circumstances".

External Influence:

The hand of America or other western powers - real or imagined - is seen in the internal politics of countries in the Middle East. This can lead to an oversimplification: liberal democracy is a western construct, Islamism is eastern; the two are incompatible and will inevitably clash.

That complicated with new players in the region, where Turkey see the opportunity to become a regional power, or to utilize the region to become a regional economic power to influence the EU to accept them over time.

Qatar, which is smaller than any city in United State or Europe, with a population less than few hundred thousands, see the opportunity to become bigger, and more influential, and probably supported by the US, since Qatar host the largest America military base in the world, they find themselves part of the equation, but unfortunately, they became too involved, dumping money for one goal, winning, even if they have the evil Islamic power helping them to win, and that what led to Jihadist, traveling from around the world to Syria, because Jihad became a secured job by the gulf states. That led to the worse bloodshed in Syria, and all falls under Democracy and Islamic changes.

Saudi Arabia find the opportunity to convince the world and Iran, that their power is not limited, and supported by the West and specifically the US, find themselves a major player against Shiite's and promoting their many years believes of Salafi's (Conservative Islam), the problem that Saudi forgot that they are on the worse list of Human Right violations, no

democracy is allowed in their country, their women still unable to vote or even drive a car, but suddenly and using the influence of money, they are the democratic champions as promoted in the west and supported by US.

Iran finds the Middle East crisis as a fantasy of the west, and they believe that it's a war against them, including the division between Shiite's and Sunni's. That gave Iran the opportunity to take advantage of the division in Iraq, and then in supporting Assad in Syria. The Iranian support in addition to Russia and China were the main reason for Assad to survive after four years of internal war. Saying that, Iran was able to survive the economic sanction, and even improve their independency in many ways, even if we try to deny, to the extent they are almost becoming a nuclear power while we are watching. The West and US did not see the Iranian influence in the area, and did not consider it a threat until it was late. Iran also found the Middle East crisis, as the best way to prove their power in the region and to show Saudi's and the Gulf the bigger message "Do not mess with us, otherwise we are ready for you". The sad part that while Iranian and despite their sanctions, find a way to strive and become independent, we find those wealthy countries, like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and UAE, all becoming more dependent, and despite all the money they made, their possible survival independently is impossible, economically, financially, and even politically, because of losing the credibility at one point they had, when King Faisal was leading that nation.

The United State find itself, intentionally or not, in the middle of these conflicts in the Middle east, where even their strategy showed a significant lack of credibility, supporting democracy in Egypt but not Saudi Arabia, supporting Jihadist in Syria and fighting them in Afghanistan, supporting the war in Libya to change the dictator, but pull out immediately, leading to the scary conflict going on there. Also the strategy of pulling out of all conflicts as promised, the US find itself telling the enemy and Jihadist, do not be scared of us, we are not coming after you, which really led to the rise of ISIS, as a major player in Syria and Iraq, but also led to the threat of losing what US gained in Iraq, and the new future for Taliban in Afghanistan. But the most conflict the US is facing is who to support in the Middle East to maintain their strategic influence and plan. The bad news that they are fighting what they supported to create, ISIS and the Syrian opposition as a religious one, led to this major conflict of supporting the same group we fought for the last fourteen years, all of that because of strategy fluctuation and uncertainty. That led also to the rise of Russia and China power, where

they saw the opportunity to rise again and become a super power as they always were. The US did not see it coming, and did not plan any strategy to overcome that, and find itself paralyzed with many International crises, because of the disconnection between reality on the ground and fantasy of what we want and wish.

If we study the West influence, as led by the US, in the Middle East, we find it shrunk beyond any time ever, because of all the conflict in strategy, and uncertainty, also find the players we wanted them out of the region becoming a bigger players, including Iran.

Regardless of the reasoning, most agree on one fact: democracy has not been the dominant form of governance in the Middle East for many years.

So is democracy possible in the Middle East?

Lets not give up hope, and be optimistic, and try to correct the path of death with the better ways of survival. Change the path of hate with the love connection. Change the path of religious division, with believing in one god to unite us, and live our religion freely no matter how much differences we have. All of this is easy to say, but doing it will require structural changes in the infrastructure of the Middle East societies; including but not limited to:

- Education: Start with the new generation, to understand democracy, not rush in thinking that democracy means Western life.
- Religion: keep it off our politics, and make our religion principles a base for our thinking and not religion the base of our politics. That also means not to suppress people because of their own beliefs, or associations.
- Educates ourselves about Islam, as a simple religion, understand the language the way it should be not the way they want us to understand. Obey authorities when they are right and raise your voice and say no when needed.
- Improve our economic status, and the west to change strategy toward supporting economies, instead of war machines. Promote peaceful changes instead of military actions. Force rich countries to use their influence to help people not ideology.
- End the war with Israel, to make armies like any government agency, has limited power, and also allow people to think about peaceful solution, and economic developments.
- Stop all external influences, allow democracy to be built locally,

based on every culture needs, and not to enforce our type of democracy everywhere, because what is good to us not for sure good to others. Allow external involvement based on respect and understanding to each country status, and promote education and ideas not ideology that lead to self-destruction.

It is too soon - and too pessimistic - to say that democracy is impossible in the Middle East. Fragile democratic systems are to be expected after years of repressive dictatorships. It takes time for these systems to become entrenched. It also takes time for a truly pluralistic political environment to evolve. For decades, opposition parties were not allowed, and many individuals who would have been natural leaders chose to leave for foreign shores. It will take many years for democracy to function effectively. However, if democracy is going to work in the Middle East, it must find a way of incorporating the full spectrum of mainstream views, from Islamism to secularism, and build itself internally to fit the region circumstances, and allow the inside people to decide not the outside world. That is the only way to have a democracy that could survive.

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