History of Islam: Is it compatible with democracy?

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HISTORY OF ISLAM: IS IT COMPATIBLE
WITH DEMOCRACY?

by

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Bachelor of Arts
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2000

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in Ethics and Policy Studies
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ABSTRACT

History of Islam: Is it Compatible with Democracy?

by

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This thesis examines the compatibility of Islam and democracy. The serious nature of the September 11, 2001 attacks prompted the United States and some international actors to embark on a “war on terrorism.” U.S. foreign policy has been inadequate in its mission of diplomacy with Islam. A historical discussion focuses on the religion of Islam and the theories of democracy. The serious nature of the issue necessitates an alternative to the current U.S. foreign policy. It is advocated that the theory of deliberative democracy applied practically is the best alternative method to address a favorable synthesis of Islam linked with democracy. Ethical issues that pertain to this dilemma will be examined and recommended.
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................................................. iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................................... vi

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 1
  The Definition of Democracy ................................................. 3
  The Definition of Islam ......................................................... 4
  Islam as a Concept ................................................................. 5
  The Sunni and The Shi’a Split ............................................. 7
  Historical Perspective ......................................................... 9
  The Present ........................................................................... 15
  The Future ............................................................................ 18

CHAPTER TWO DEMOCRATIC THEORY ............................................................................................... 22
  Deliberative Democracy Theory ......................................... 27
  Deliberative Democracy: Its Three Principles ......................... 28
  Reciprocity ........................................................................... 30
  Deliberative Democracy: International Perspective .................. 36
  Deliberative Democracy: Moral Constituents ......................... 37
  Deliberative Democracy: Its Opponents .................................. 41
  Nelson: Liberalism ................................................................. 47
  Nelson: Contractualist Perspective and Rights ......................... 50

CHAPTER THREE ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY ....................................................................................... 58
  Realist ................................................................................... 59
  Imagined Prospects for an Islamic Democracy ....................... 65
  Islam and Pluralist Democracy ............................................. 68
  Islam and Shari’a ................................................................. 71
  The Challenge of Pluralism ................................................. 76
  Islam and Sovereignty ......................................................... 81
  Opponents ............................................................................ 84
  Said: Orientalism ................................................................. 88

CHAPTER FOUR DYNAMICS OF ISLAM ............................................................................................... 94
  Islamism ............................................................................... 96
  History of Islamism .............................................................. 97
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

There must have been a deep and passionate belief that drove nineteen Muslim hijackers in the prime of their lives to seize the controls of four airliners on September 11, 2001 and fulfill their grim suicidal mission. Before we can ever begin to comprehend what happened on September 11, we must understand some of the roots of this pervasive and deep-seated anger against the U.S. that looms so prominently and menacingly in the cultural landscape of the contemporary Islamic world. But, we also must realize that this stereotyped image of an enraged Islam is only part of the story. While it is true that conflict has been a prominent theme in relations between the West and Islamic societies, both ancient and modern history show that some degree of cultural symbiosis between the two great civilizations has also been a part of that relationship. It is especially true that modern Muslims’ responses to the West have actually been more complex and nuanced than the media stereotypes of an enraged Islam would suggest.

Can deliberative dialogue ameliorate the clash of Islam and democracy? Can a democratic polity be linked with Islam? I will attempt to address these questions throughout the following chapters.

In Chapter Two, I will explain how the development of democratic theories leads to my examination of the possibility that deliberative democracy could be an alternative method with its emphasis on deliberation for assuring a peaceful Middle East. There are

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certainly alternative prescriptions and conditions of democracy for the hopeful amelioration of the clash of Islam and democracy. The controversial opponents of the theory of deliberative democracy are discussed and it is noted that not even they disagree that mutual understanding and respect are key to the future of Islam and democracy. Indeed, these qualities are the essential conditions of deliberation.

Chapter Three will attempt to define the long history of Islam and democracy, and their distinctions, variances, and complexities. This attempt will provide the discussion for imagining the prospects for an Islamic democracy while taking into account the nuances, problems, and alternatives in the rationale for a favorable synergy between Islam and democracy. It is noted that the intellectual, religious, political, and cultural currents cannot be pinpointed under - or, as sharing - one sole common denominator.

In Chapter Four, I will attempt to discuss the dynamism of the Islamic tradition with its ongoing practical evolution in the 21st century. I will define key terms and then make an attempt to discuss the issues of Islamism as a movement with potential benefits to deliberative dialogue in the Muslim world. Islamism has become a primary vehicle and vocabulary of most political discourse throughout the Muslim world. In this respect, Islamism and potential deliberation within its movement could be a mobilizing channel that in a hopeful sense could define and serve as the mission behind U.S. foreign policy. The focus of deliberation is the notion that there are means to find a morally justifiable way of making binding collective decisions in the face of continuing moral conflict. This is a fundamental issue within the conflict between Islam and democracy, and with the theory of deliberation and its emphasis on dialogue in a practical sense; a mutual respect among Muslims could be valued.
In the final chapter (Chapter Five), I will state my conclusions and provide recommendations on how to achieve the goal set forth in the conclusion, along with a brief rationale for those recommendations. The list of recommendations is neither comprehensive nor specific and is offered irrespective of economic interests. It is a broad list of recommendations which I think U.S. policymakers should adopt in their approach to a peaceful commingling of Islam and democracy with an emphasis on deliberation.

The Definition of Democracy

Democracy is government by the people. This is a definition most dictionaries report and one likely to meet with general approval. It also fits the etymology of the term: 

demos, the people, and kratein, to rule, are its Greek roots. Ancient philosophers and statesmen used this concept in a reasonably straightforward way. “We are called a democracy,” said Pericles, “because the administration is in the hands of many and not of the few.” Aristotle, after distinguishing several kinds of democracy, says at last, “We may lay it down generally that a system which does not allow every citizen to share is oligarchial (oligos, few) and that one which does so is democratic.” Abraham Lincoln’s often quoted phrase, “government of the people, by the people, and for the people,” suggests the same general idea. Democracy is a system in which the people govern themselves.2 This requires vision, thought, word, and deed. By means of these four capacities we 1) perceive the vision of democracy, 2) conceive its practicalities, 3) decide on it and 4) carry out the decisions. These four steps are represented as levels of abstraction on Plato’s “Divided Line” at 509d of his Republic.
Democracy has become the foremost political ideal in the world. Democracy can be used to refer to very different things, and very different words can be used to refer to the same thing and thus there are confusions as Carl Cohen would defend in his book titled, *Democracy*. Ultimately, democracy has developed over time. Just as it has gone through many different stages in the past, it will continue to evolve and hopefully improve in the future. It is not monolithic. There is a divergence of conceptions of democracy. This means that democracy, like ‘justice’ or ‘freedom,’ is what some call a ‘contested’ concept embedded within rival theories. Thus, democracy is divergent, has a multitude of dimensions, distinctions, variances, and complexities. Accordingly, I will examine more fully the theory of democracy and its alternative prescriptions and conditions in the next chapter.

The Definition of Islam

The word ‘Islam’ literally means submission to God. This submission requires a fully conscious and willing effort to submit to the one Almighty God. One must consciously and conscientiously give oneself to the service of Allah. This means to act on what Allah enjoins all of us to do (in the *Qur’an*) and what His beloved Prophet Muhammad encouraged all to do in his *Sunnah* (his lifestyle and sayings personifying the *Qur’an*).

Once we humble ourselves, rid ourselves of our egoism and submit totally to Allah, and to Him exclusively, in faith and in action, we will surely feel peace in our hearts. Establishing peace in our hearts will bring about peace in our external conduct as well.\(^3\)

Islam is careful to remind us that it not a religion to be paid mere lip service; rather it is an all-encompassing way of life that must be practiced continuously for it to be
Islam. The Muslim must practice the five pillars of the religion: (1) the declaration of faith in the oneness of Allah and the prophethood of Muhammad, (2) prayer, (3) fasting the month of Ramadan, (4) alms-tax, and (5) the pilgrimage to Makkah; and believe in the six articles of faith: belief in God, the Holy Books, the prophets, the angels, the Day of Judgment and God's decree, whether for good or ill.

There are other injunctions and commandments, which concern virtually all facets of one's personal, family and civic life. These include such matters as diet, clothing, personal hygiene, interpersonal relations, business ethics, responsibilities towards parents, spouse and children, marriage, divorce and inheritance, civil and criminal law, fighting in defense of Islam, relations with non-Muslims, and much more.

Islam as a Concept

Islam is an Arabic word which, since Mohammed's time, has acquired a religious and technical significance denoting the religion of Mohammed and of the Qur'an, just as Christianity denotes that of Jesus and of the Gospels, or Judaism that of Moses, the Prophets, and of the Old Testament.

Grammatically, the word Islam is the infinitive of the so-called fourth verbal form of the regular intransitive stem salima, "to be safe", "to be secure", etc. In its second verbal form (sallama) it means "to make some one safe" and "to free", "to make secure", etc. In its third form (salama), it signifies "to make peace", or "to become at peace", i.e. "to be reconciled". In its fourth form (aslama), the infinitive of which is Islam, it acquires the sense of "to resign", "to submit oneself" or "to surrender". Hence Islam, in its ethico-religious significance, means the "entire surrender of the will to God", and its professors
are called Muslimun (sing. Muslim), which is the participial form, that is "those who have surrendered themselves", or "believers", as opposed to the "rejectors" of the Divine message, who are called Kafirs, Mushriks (that is those who associate various gods with the Deity), or pagans.\textsuperscript{5}

Historically, of course, to become a Muslim was to become a follower of Mohammed and of his religion; and it is very doubtful whether the earliest Muslims or followers of Mohammed, had any clear notion of the ethico-religious significance of the term, although its later theological development is entirely consistent and logical. According to the Shafiites (one of the four great Mohammedan schools of theology), Islam, as a principle of the law of God, is "the manifesting of humility or submission, and outward conforming with the law of God, and the taking upon oneself to do or to say as the Prophet has done or said"; and if this outward manifestation of religion is coupled with "a firm and internal belief of the heart", i.e. faith, then it is called Iman. Hence the Mohammedan theological axiom "Islam is with the tongue, and Iman is with the heart."

According to the Hanafites (another of the four above-mentioned schools), however, no distinction is to be made between the two terms, as Iman, according to them, is essentially included in Islam.

Islam is sometimes divided under two heads of "Faith", or "Iman", and "Practical Religion", or "Din". Faith (Iman) includes a belief in one God, omnipotent, omniscient, all-merciful, the author of all good, and in Mohammed as His prophet, expressed in the formula: "There is no God but God, and Mohammed is the Prophet of God." It includes also, belief in the authority and sufficiency of the Qur'an, in angels, genii, and the devil, in the immortality of the soul, the resurrection, the day of judgment, and in the God's
absolute decree for good and evil. Practical religion (\textit{din}), on the other hand, consists of five observances, viz.: recital of the formula of belief, prayer with ablution, fasting, almsgiving, and the pilgrimage to Mecca.\textsuperscript{6}

The Sunni and The Shi'a Split

In today's world and in the context of this thesis it is absolutely essential to know the fundamental difference between Sunni and Shi'a Islam if one wishes to grasp a comprehensible understanding of Islam and in particular the Middle East. Therefore, I will give a brief history of the Sunni-Shi'a split. By no means is this a detailed history of the two different entities but it will enable the reader to gain at least some sort of grasp on the differences between the two.

Islam can effectively be split in two when it comes to religious leadership in the community. On the one hand there are the Sunnis who believe that the Caliphs (Islamic religious leaders) are merely mortal and therefore hold no divine power, and on the other hand there are the Shi'ites who believe the Imam (basically the Shi'a counterpart to the Caliph) is a direct descendant of Muhammad and therefore has a direct connection to God. Shi'ism began to form a few years following the Prophet Muhammad's death, however, it began to gain momentum after the murder of Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law.

In 656 AD, Ali took claim to the right of Caliphate; however, it was contested by Mu'awiyah, the governor of Syria. This contestation ended up with a civil war between the Muslims pitting those who supported Mu'awiyah on one side, and those who supported Ali on the other. Although this provided no clear victor, most of Ali's supporters subsequently deserted him, leaving the space open for Mu'awiyah to expand
his power and become Caliphate. From then on, Ali's power deteriorated and he was eventually murdered in 661 AD. When Mu'awiyah's son, Yazid, succeeded in becoming the next Caliphate, the Shi'a of Ali managed to persuade Ali's son, Husayn, to lead a rebellion against Yazid. Husayn eventually failed and was killed at Karbala (in contemporary Iraq), but to the Shi'ites this was seen as a martyrdom, as Husayn was attempting to topple the "tyrannical" Umayyad dynasty.

After Husayn's death, Karbala has become the holiest shrine of the Shi'ites and the mourning of Husayn at that site has become the most important religious ceremony to the Shi'ite Muslims. This ceremony is called Ashura and has been the topic of many news reports, as recently as a suicide bomber killed 30 people at the eve of its initiation. Last year blasts killed 181 people. Hence, it becomes obvious already that the Sunni-Shi'a split still reverberates the walls of present day geopolitics, especially concerning the Middle East. Since then, Muslim history has been dotted with events that has put Shi'a Muslims against Sunni Muslims; and has had lasting effects that can especially be seen in modern day Iran and Iraq. Also, another important note to make here is that although the Sunni's and Shi'ites have their differences in terms of religious ceremonies, both consider themselves Islamic in origin, so it is incorrect to consider them both as two seperate religions (although this may be argued against by religious experts on both sides of the equation).

Within Shi’a Islam there are different sects. Most Shi’ites are “Twelvers”, i.e. they recognize the twelve Imams. There are also Sevener and Fiver Shi’ites who do not recognize the later Imams. A dispute over succession to leadership of the Shi’a in 765 AD separated the two principal branches of that movement, the Imami Shi’a, who are now the dominant religious group in Iran and southern Iraq, and the Ismaili Shi’a, found mostly in India and led by the Agha Khan. Both of these sects are represented in
Afghanistan. The more unorthodox Shi’a believe that the imam must be a descendant of Ali and that he has exclusive authority in secular and religious matters. There are subgroups of Shi’a who differ among themselves as to the true line of imams.

The Sunnis are strictly orthodox in their obedience to the Qur’an and in the emphasis they place on following the deeds and utterances of the Prophet. Sunnis follow one of the four legal schools: the Maliki, Shafi, Hanafi, and Hanbali, which differ on the relative importance given to the consensus about the views expressed in the hadith (sayings of the prophet Muhammed) and the freedom of interpretation given to judges. The Hanafi school of Sunnism, to which most Afghans belong, is the most tolerant school concerning interpretation of the hadith. Founded in Baghdad in the eight century, it became the dominant Sunni legal school under the Ottomans, and is now the most widespread in the Islamic world.

Historical Perspective

According to Bernard Lewis, a world-renowned Islamic scholar, “the first Muslim community was organized out of tribes whose pre-Islamic identities derived from intense, complicated structures of tribal solidarity”. Tribes had their own poets who sang the tribes’ history and glories. They had their own holy men and gods, and their own tribal war cries handed down for generations. The Prophet persuaded the members of these divided tribes to see themselves as united by a belief in God and in Muhammad’s prophecy. Lewis further pointed out that adopting Islam meant transcending tribal solidarity to put one’s identity as a Muslim and a member of the community of Muslims first. That the prophet’s revolutionary message of community formation succeeded in
such an inhospitable environment is testament to its appeal, and to the early Muslims’
capacity to imagine themselves in new ways. The coalescence of the Arab tribes under
the banner of the Muslim community was as remarkable as it was formidable.¹⁰

When Prophet Muhammad was on his deathbed, many sincere Muslims were
alarmed at the prospects of disunity among the new nation and asked him, repeatedly to
appoint a “successor”. To the chagrin of many, Prophet Muhammad refused to do so
clearly sending the signal that his mission as a prophet was now complete and it is up to
them to pick and choose who and how they will be ruled. This very important point is a
fundamental principle in Islamic democracy and is what we call today “self-government”.

According to Radwan Masmoudi, the wisdom of the Prophet highlights two major points:

1- If the Prophet appointed a “successor”, that person could claim infallibility and
really abuse his position and authority. It would be almost impossible to stop him.
2- The political system needed to evolve and change depending on changing
conditions in history and geography. If the Prophet had fixed it in time before his death,
it would be a complete disservice to the future generations of Muslims.¹¹

Based on this, the Prophet and Allah wanted to give the Muslim ummah (as the true and
only representatives of God on earth) the right and the duty to select who will rule them,
and to hold him (or her) accountable. The source of political authority (sovereignty) was
therefore transferred to the ummah and not to a single individual or group of people.

Therefore, just as there is no religious class (hierarchy) in Islam, there also is no single
representative of God on earth who deserves to be obeyed and followed at all times.
Therefore the Islamic State is not, technically a religious state (theocracy), ruled by a
religious elite. Rather, it belongs to the people, who are collectively responsible for
organizing themselves in a way that best serves their interests and in a way that is also
compatible with the principles of Qur’an.
So, when the Prophet died, Muslims were forced to gather in one place and decide on their political future. They elected Abu Bakr as their ruler, although this vote was not scientific (they did the best they could) or unanimous. Some form of political opposition began on that day, when some other Muslim leaders including Ali Ibn Abu Talib, the prophet's son-in-law, disagreed with that decision. However, most of the early Muslim leaders (sahabas) were trained by the prophet to be selfless and to tolerate differences of opinions. So they accepted the rule of Abu Bakr as the wish of the majority, even though some disagreed with it. Unfortunately, those early Muslim pioneers did not foresee the real dangers of conflict and civil war that could result if they did not develop a system of checks and balances that could 'guarantee' that the ruler did not have excessive powers or did not diverge too much from the will of the majority. They trusted that Abu Bakr had the knowledge, expertise, and wisdom to not deviate too much from the teachings of Allah and his prophet.

After a short period of time, Abu Bakr died and Muslims had to gather again to choose another leader. This time they picked Omar ibn al-Khattab, who was another very close companion of the prophet with a tough-minded approach. Another excellent choice, but again the vote was not unanimous and the opposition was growing. The early Muslim pioneers, unfortunately, again failed to see the growing dangers of political dissent if it was not organized and channeled into political institutions with clear guidelines and objectives (political parties, election methods, parliament, etc.). One day, Omar was giving a sermon in the Mosque and he told the crowd that he was elected as their leader but he was not the best among them. He said that he would try to rule according to the teachings of Allah and his prophet, but that if he made a mistake, they
should correct him. One person rose from the crowd and told Omar that if he deviated from the book, they would correct him with “the edge of the sword.” Unfortunately, neither Omar nor the rest of the Muslims scholars and companions saw the dangers of this approach to ‘correcting the ruler.’ Someone should have jumped and said that it was not an acceptable way, and that Muslims needed to develop a better way of correcting the ruler when he errs. Someone should have reminded that person that the prophet said: “the best Jihad is to say the truth in front of an oppressive ruler” (not to kill that ruler). Unfortunately, no one did.

A few years later, Omar was killed. History tells us that Omar was a great man and a great ruler; just, selfless, and compassionate. However, even great men have opponents who may disagree with them on one or more issues or actions. By that time, political unrest and dissent was growing in the incipient nation. The following two leaders (Khulafas), Othman and Ali, were elected in a similar manner, but hard as they tried to contain dissent and unite the umma, the opposition to their rule and form of government was growing. Both of them were killed. When Ali was killed (about 30 years after Prophet’s Muhammad death), the unrest had grown and engulfed almost the whole umma. Muslim armies of hundreds of thousands, led by the Prophet’s companions, were fighting each other over who was “entitled” to rule the umma. There was so much unrest and destruction during this ‘civil war’ that the new ruler (Muawiya) decided unilaterally that his successor should be his son. According to Masmoudi, his justification was that:

a. It would be impossible for the whole Muslim umma, which had grown by a factor of a hundred during that period of time, to either vote or agree on a ruler.
b. To avoid further bloodshed, it is better that he appoints a successor.12
A few Muslim scholars disagreed with him and refused to go along (give *baya*).

However, the majority was intimidated, by sheer force and the threat of chaos, into submission. The Muslims had failed to establish a system that would accomplish their major objectives of uniting the *umma*, and yet rule according to the will of the majority and hold the rulers accountable. Muslims had to choose between unity under a dictator, or chaos under freedom. From that point on, the Muslim history was interwoven by periods of freedom, dictatorship, chaos, and unity. However, as is always the case when one man or a small group of people has a monopoly over political power, the result was mostly fear, intimidation, and tyranny. In order to justify their oppression, these rulers often co-opted some religious ‘scholars’ into giving them ‘Islamic’ legitimacy as the “ameer al-mumineen” or the “khalifat rasul Allah”.

Occasionally, Muslims would get lucky and get a God-fearing ruler. One such ruler was Omar ibn Abdel-aziz, often referred to as the fifth of the Khulafa al-rashideen. Upon inheriting the throne from his uncle, Omar realized that he inherited something that did not belong to him or to his uncle. He declared to the nation that he gives them back their ‘*baya*’, which his great grandfather took by force, and that they were free to choose (i.e. elect) the ruler that they wanted. Upon hearing that, Muslims were astonished and realized that Omar was a special person and then chose him of their own free will.

With few such exceptions, Muslims were ruled by dictators and tyrants who ruled with the threat of the sword. The only way to get rid of them was to also use force and/or declare a revolution/mutiny. This happened many times, as different dynasties came and went in the different parts of the Muslim world, but the people (i.e. the majority) were usually absent from any decision-making. Muslims learned to tolerate a little bit of abuse.
from their rulers as long as those rulers did not go overboard and generally left people
alone. Politics was a matter for the elite.

While this situation sounds bad, in fact it was much better than in many other
parts of the world where the rulers were not only un-elected, they were also extremely
brutal and abusive. In general, Muslim rulers were kept in check by the law (Sharia) and
by the judiciary, which was more or less independent. Muslim rulers always knew that if
they stepped out of their bounds, they would be overthrown or killed, because Muslim
masses realized that they had a responsibility to keep the government in check. They just
did not have a peaceful way to do so. The sword (or the gun) was the only way to settle
political differences.

After centuries of great civilization and development, Muslims began to decline at
every level in the 15th century, which coincided with the rise of the European civilization.
The mainly Christian Europeans were tired of their rulers who were closely intertwined
with the church. They decided to overthrow their kings and with them, church rule. This
began in France, but quickly spread to the rest of Europe. A book, written by Rose
Wilder Lane, and titled *Islam and the Discovery of Freedom*\(^1\), suggests that Europeans
learned the value and importance of freedom mainly from the Muslims. In the Muslim
world, the rulers and the mosque (the ulamas) were mostly separate entities that operated
almost independently of each other. Mosques ran on foundations, endowments, and
donations from the public. Europeans decided that they “had it” with their kings and
wanted to have more say in their day-to-day life as well as the way their government is
run. The old ideals of democracy and government accountability were revived and
strengthened.
The Present

At the beginning of the 20th century, the majority of Muslim countries were colonized by European powers. This was a clear reflection of the advancement of European civilizations and cultures and the extent of the fall of the Muslim civilizations during the last 3 or 4 centuries. When Muslim countries fought for independence, Islam was usually the rallying point. However, when Muslim countries became independent, the Muslim elites felt that they needed to take drastic actions to catch up with the west. Many of them, including Atatürk in Turkey and Bourguiba in Tunisia, felt that Islam was an impediment to modernity, and that if they wanted to develop their countries, they needed to leave Islam aside. Secularism, or complete separation between the state and religion, became a popular idea, especially among the western educated intelligentsia. However, the majority of the people was still deeply religious, and felt that Islam is still their 'way of life'. Two completely different societies were living side-by-side, with very little interaction.

The modernizing efforts of the secularists might have succeeded if they had not become “anti-religious.” The true definition of secularism is separation of religion and state, however, in the Muslim countries, the state wanted to destroy the mosque because it felt threatened by it. Similarly most secularists, especially the leftists and the communists, were really atheists and went as far as repeating the Marxist slogan “religion is the opium of the people”. Instead of leaving religion alone, Arab and ‘Muslim’ secularists wanted to remove and/or destroy Islam. It is true that the interpretations of Islam that they were confronted with, at the beginning of this century, were mostly archaic and old-fashioned and probably not suited for the modern age. However, the
correct and proper response should have been to revitalize and modernize Islamic thinking (using *Ijtihad*) and to ‘Islamize’ modernity.

Modern Muslim rulers did not have the training or the patience to initiate such an intellectual effort. Furthermore, they felt threatened by the Muslim scholars (*ulamas*) who did not want to go along with their modernization and secularization programs. Democratic traditions were, of course, very weak and so Muslim leaders became tyrants and dictators. The intellectual and political elites felt that their programs were the right ones, and the masses were not educated or ‘qualified’ to express their opinions about them. Anyone expressing opposition or criticism was swiftly silenced.

Partly as a response to the “secular” attack, and partly as a way to establish and strengthen their identities, the people became more religious. This is indeed a strange, but not unique, phenomenon: the more the rulers wanted their societies to ‘leave religion aside’, the more these societies became religious. The best examples are Iran, Turkey, and Tunisia. In order to stay in power, these and other ‘secular’ regimes had to resort to violence and the military. This in turn made secularism unpopular, as it became almost synonymous with dictatorship. As political dissent was still banned and punished, the mosques became the only place where people could meet and vent their frustrations. Islamic movements became popular and began to challenge the governments’ legitimacy. The regimes responded by cracking down on dissent and especially on the religious/Islamic movements. Many, but thankfully not most, Islamic movements resorted to violence/terrorism as a way to counteract the violence of the regimes. The cycle of violence became a real danger to the very existence of many countries.
This cycle of violence was not just a threat to the physical well being of the Muslims; it also was a threat to their intellectual development. Ideas about Islamic political thought, the system of government, elections and accountability, and even secularism needed to be addressed and discussed. Unfortunately, the atmosphere of violence and fear was not conducive to any debate. Islamists, i.e., people who believe that Islam has a role to play in politics, could not find a safe environment in which they could debate their ideas and proposals. Simplistic answers, such as “the Qur’an is our constitution”, were the only thing they could provide. This, however, did not diminish their popularity, as the secularists did not fare any better. Both suffered from the same suffocating environment of fear and intimidation.

In 1979, the Islamic revolution in Iran proved that Islam was still a very powerful political force, even at the end of the 20th century and in one of the most secularized countries in the Muslim world. Since secularism was tied to oppression and tyrannical governments, it was doomed to fail. Muslim governments felt threatened by the revolution and began to see the need for reforms and a more open government. In the eighties, many governments in the Muslim world tried to implement small steps toward ‘democracy’. However, it was hard for them to control the pace of democratization. The more steps they took toward democracy, the more the people demanded, and the more they (the governments) felt threatened. In the late eighties, three Islamic movements (in Tunisia, Algeria, and Turkey) almost came to power through general elections. The secular reaction was strong and swift: confrontations at all levels until the ‘threat’ was removed. In the nineties, most governments cracked down on their opposition (Islamic
and secular) and undid the small democratic reforms they had implemented in the eighties.

The Future

Today, in the beginning of the 21st century and a new millennium, the Islamic world is in crisis. Open, and often violent, confrontations are the norm between Islamists and secularists, and between government loyalists and opponents. There is a lot at stake. The political future of these countries, more than 55 countries with 1.2 billion inhabitants\textsuperscript{15}, is at stake, but so is peace and stability in these countries and all over the world.

The old methods of oppression are simply outdated. More than 50\% of the population of Muslim countries is under 30 years old. They did not witness colonization, and do not care about the independence struggle. Some are highly educated, they speak several languages, and they watch CNN and al-Jazeera. Many of them even have access to the Internet. They see how other people live, in terms of prosperity and freedom, and they want the same. They watch other peoples vote and elect their new leaders, while they are stuck with the same rulers for what seems like eternity. The new generation is fed up with the status quo. Change is inevitable. The only question that remains is: What kind of change?

According to Masmoudi, Muslims living in this century have to find answers to these critical questions:

1. How do we elect our rulers and how do we hold them accountable?
2. How long should they stay in power?
3. How do we guarantee that the rulers do not abuse their power?
4. How do we make laws? And how do we make sure that those laws serve the interests of the majority of the people?
5. How can we guarantee that the rights of the minorities are preserved and protected?\(^\text{16}\)

Masmoudi mentions that most of all, Muslims must learn to live with differences of opinions, encourage diversity, and benefit from the opinions and experiences of everyone. Differences of opinions, including in political matters, are normal and can be healthy. Even the Sahabas and the early Muslim scholars had diverging opinions. All the scholars used to say: “this is my opinion, and God knows best”, because they realized that their opinions could be wrong. Since the Prophet did not appoint a ‘successor’ and since there is no religious hierarchy, there is no spokesman for Islam. There is no one person or institution that can go back to resolve disputes or differences.\(^\text{17}\)

Masmoudi further states that, “We must find an acceptable way to resolve political differences without resorting to violence and intimidation. In my humble opinion, there are only two ways to resolve political differences: the first is to fight with arms and guns and let the winner rule. This is the way of \textit{Qabeel}, and the way that we have been ruled for the last 1400 years. This way automatically leads to unspeakable violence, destruction, and fear, and is clearly against Islam. The other way is through dialogue, debate and discussions.” Allah ordered his Prophet to: “call to the path of your Lord through wisdom and good advice and do not argue with them except in the best of manners”. Accordingly, if Muslims are ordered to deal with the non-Muslims in this manner, then they surely can treat other fellow Muslims with dignity, respect and tolerance.\(^\text{18}\)

The latter is clearly the more consistent Islamic path, but one question remains. What do Muslims do if they have tried dialogue and debate, and no consensus emerges,
as is often the case in political matters and disputes? Was there deliberation? Do Muslims then turn to violence and shutting down the opposition, or do they simply go with the will and wishes of the majority? I would argue that in such cases, going with the majority makes much more sense because the majority has a much bigger chance of being correct. But, then again, political decisions are open to change and review. It is often the fact that some minority needs may require a place even though they are marginal - as is provided in the case of proportional representation. Is it time that we allow the people to rule themselves and trust that majority rule is always better than minority rule? At the same time, the rights of the minorities must be protected, because there is a chance they could be right and become the majority of tomorrow. Ultimately, the people must be the judge if Muslims want to protect and safeguard the interests of their nations. Neither secularism nor Islam can be imposed on the people. These ideas will be addressed in chapter two which will attempt to examine the history of Islam and democracy, and their distinctions, variances, and complexities.
Endnotes


5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.


8 Ibid.


10 Ibid., 44.


12 Ibid., 3.


14 *Ijtihad*: the endeavor of a Muslim scholar to derive a rule of divine law from the *Qur'an* and Hadith without relying on the views of other scholars; by the end of the 10th century theologians decided that debate on such matters would be closed and Muslim theology and law were frozen; “some reform-minded Islamic scholars believe that reopening *ijtihad* is a prerequisite for the survival of Islam”


17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.
CHAPTER TWO

DEMOCRATIC THEORY

Some twenty-four hundred years ago, Plato disparagingly described democracy as “a charming form of government, full of variety and disorder, and dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike” at 558 of his Republic. Despite Plato’s warning that democracy would degenerate into tyranny, the last decade of the twentieth century has demonstrated that the opposite is possible. Has democracy been vindicated, both in practice and in theory? Only time will tell, but this “charming form of government” has gained territory in the aftermath of the collapse of communist tyrannies around the world, while interest in democratic theory has enjoyed a corresponding renewal. In recent years, political theorists have reexamined traditional themes in democratic theory and given them novel interpretations. The nature of popular sovereignty, the limits of democratic political authority, and radical forms of democracy that involve greater levels of citizen participation have all been subjects of intense debate.

Prominent philosophers and political theorists are exploring these issues and related topics. Some discuss the appropriate ends of government or examine the difficulties involved in determining and carrying out the will of the people. Some address questions relating to the kinds of influence citizens can or should have over their representatives, asking, for example, whether individuals have a duty to vote, or whether inequalities in political influence among citizens (measured in terms of campaign
contributions) can be normally justified. Other writings analyze democratic institutions, discussing what role deliberation should play in the democratic process, or asking whether it is legitimate to use laws and public policies to express approval or disapproval of various kinds of conduct. Still others examine the relationship between democracy and value pluralism, or consider the suitability of democracy as a form of government in non-Western societies.

A comprehensive collection of writings of democratic theorists consists of classical thought (Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Cicero) through medieval views (Augustine, Aquinas) to modern perspectives (Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Rousseau, Hume, Adam Smith, Kant). It includes major nineteenth-century thinkers (Hegel, Bentham, Mill, Nietzsche) as well as twentieth-century theorists (Rawls, Nozick, Nagel, Foucault, Habermas, Nussbaum).

When we think about political justice in a modern, western, capitalist, democratic society, we think about issues of equality and liberty. Usually, it is a discussion around the moral equality of human beings at some fundamental level and their inherent rights to live the life that they, as individual, see fit. Justice is what is derived from these two elements and political justice is how the state relates to its citizens regarding these two elements, if either the liberty or equality of its citizens is out of balance, justice is compromised. Thus, justice as a balance of liberty and equality has many interpretations.

In addition, in a modern democratic state, issues of legitimacy are paramount in justice issues. Such strong emphasis is being placed on legitimacy in the current culture that justice is proposed as analogous with, or presupposing, legitimacy. Various versions of this theory exists, but all heavily equate justice with the process used to define justice.
Thus, questions of who is involved in the process, and the context that they are in, are very important to this proceduralist theory. The substantivist, on the other hand, believes there is a substantive, morally right answer to the question of justice. This ‘best solution’ is reachable by an outside, rational means and in the perfect sense, does not explicitly worry if it is legitimated by ‘the people.’ They argue that people agreeing to something (justice) does not make it the right answer. Social contract theorists typically try to walk the line between the procedural and substantive theories.

Rawls, the foremost liberal distributive justice theorist, believes justice is distributive. This does not mean that distributive justice must be about rectifying inequalities through redistributing income. Rather, distribution is about primary goods defined as “what persons need in their status as free and equal citizens, and as normal and fully cooperating members of society over a complete life.” In other words, things like rights, opportunities, liberties, and self-respect. Unequal distribution of wealth is not bad in and of itself, but bad because it leads to inequality of the basic goods needed to live a good life.

Rawls’ theory of justice has a jumping off point that originates in the unjust distribution of good in society and yet he is arguing that if his procedure is followed, the outcome must be fair. He seems to want to give the process and the substantive claims of justice equal footing. “In justice as fairness, then, the guidelines of public reason and the principles of justice have essentially the same grounds. They are companion parts of one agreement.” Rawls focus is on the procedural justice. The substance is to be built in at the start, with the two principles. In other words, Rawls understands the value of both procedural and substantive justice.
There are certainly alternative conditions for democracy and Rawls *Theory of Justice* provided political philosophy with the most influential normative work of the last two generations. My attempt within this chapter is to evaluate a response to Rawls, the theory of deliberative democracy, arguing that it provides a different, and more defensible approach to the problem that democratic theorists must confront in the fundamental problem of finding a morally justifiable way of making binding collective decisions in the face of continuing disagreement. My evaluation of deliberative democracy begins in terms of its meaning, its basic principles, and reciprocity. I then focus discussion on the international perspective of deliberative democracy. In our increasingly interdependent world, the practical and ethical arguments for confining deliberative democracy to the internal policies of single societies can only go so far. Thus, a cosmopolitan position of deliberative democracy is examined to the extent that public officials in all democracies accept the burden of providing justification to those who are significantly affected by their decisions, thus foreigners become “moral constituents” even if they are not electoral constituents. The opponents of deliberative democracy are taken into account in this chapter along with the nuances, complexities, and alternative conditions for deliberative democracy.

My point in examining the theory of deliberative democracy is not meant to be confined to Putnam, Tocqueville, Madison or to any others, but will apply to any list of putative conditions for democracy in the hope for the commingling of Islam and democracy. For instance, Robert Dahl sees a highly developed economy and modern, European or North American style society as a favorable and almost exceptional condition for democracy in a way that would exclude the aboriginal societies that other
theorists regard as viable, and in some respects, superior forms of democracy. While Schumpeter thought democracy required relative freedom of government from public scrutiny, Michael Margolis makes encouragement of public criticism of government one of the conditions for a viable democracy. Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers list publicly organized debate as a precondition for the form of democracy they favor, unlike Schmitt, who, as noted earlier, criticized parliamentarianism largely for spawning what he saw as debilitating and divisive debate. Cohen and Rogers think the absence of large economic disparities is required for democracy to function well, a claim explicitly criticized in his discussion of conditions for democracy by Carl Cohen and concurred with by J. Roland Pennock. Pennock lists nationalism as a condition for democracy in the modern world, thus disagreeing with the view of Karl Popper who sees nationalism as incompatible with a democratic, 'open society'.

Recommending conditions for securing, projecting, or extending democracy (be they necessary, sufficient, or just facilitating) is, of course, an important task for democratic theorists who want their views to have practical effect, and alternative prescriptions along these lines will be noted in subsequent discussions in this thesis. But such prescriptions will always be themselves laden with prior theories about the nature and value of democracy.

A theory of democratic institutions should provide us with a coherent combination of definition and justification. It should explain how it defines democratic institutions and also how they will or should function, but it also should explain why democracy, so understood, is desirable. We are all familiar with stories about fiscal excesses to which democracies are prone, stories about the ignorance of voters, and
stories about the venality of legislators. Some of us may also be suspicious of concepts such as “consent” or “the will of the people” associated with traditional arguments for democracy. Against this background, the current interest in deliberative democracy seems promising. This conception of democracy does not rely, for example, on the idea of rational and knowledgeable voters satisfying preferences they have independent of the political process. Nor does it rely on any notion of an independent popular will. Instead it offers a picture of the democratic process as one in which men and women engage in constructive discussion, seeking a principled resolution of their differences and, over time, developing a conception of the terms on which they will live with one another.⁶

It is an interesting and somewhat surprising fact of the modern world that liberal democracy has become the single most accepted model for organizing and controlling state power. Democracy has been consolidated (albeit in significantly impaired versions) in North America, Western Europe, Australia, large parts of Latin America, and in important parts of Asia. In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the governments formed in the aftermath of Communism have committed themselves, with varying degrees of sincerity, to the establishment of liberal democratic institutions. Even in South Africa, the two sides of a bitterly contested racial divide have agreed on the desirability of liberal democracy as the most appropriate means for constituting political power and resolving conflict.

Deliberative Democracy Theory

Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson⁷ argue that a deliberative theory of democracy provides a different and better approach to this problem because it leaves
open the possibility that the moral values expressed by a wide range of theories may be justifiable. Deliberative democracy is a conception of democratic politics in which decisions and policies are justified in a process of discussion among free and equal citizens. In their view, a deliberative theory contains a set of principles that prescribe fair terms of cooperation. Its fundamental principle is that citizens owe one another justifications for the laws they collectively impose on one another. The theory is deliberative because the terms of cooperation that it recommends are conceived as reasons that citizens give to one another in an ongoing process of mutual justification. The reasons are not merely procedural (“because the majority favors it”) or purely substantive (“because it is a human right”). They appeal to moral principles (such as basic liberty or equal opportunity) that citizens who are motivated to find fair terms of cooperation can reasonably accept. Because the range of acceptable reasons are wider than in most theories, the principles of deliberative democracy are, in specific ways Gutmann and Thompson describe, more open to revision than those of most other theories.

Deliberative Democracy: Its Three Principles

The three principles that provide the content of deliberative democracy according to Gutmann and Thompson are (a) basic liberty, (b) basic opportunity, and (c) fair opportunity, which also flow from the basic principle of reciprocity.

Laws cannot be mutually justified, as reciprocity requires, if they violate the personal integrity of individuals. The principle of basic liberty therefore calls for
protecting the personal integrity of each person, through such protections as freedom of speech, religion, and conscience, and due process and equal protection under the law.

Mutually binding institutions, laws, and politics that deprive individuals of the basic opportunities necessary for making choices among good lives cannot be mutually justified. Those basic opportunities typically include adequate health care, education, security, work, and income. These goods are necessary for living a decent life and having the ability to make choices among good lives. A principle of basic opportunity calls for giving individuals the capacity to make choices among good lives by providing them with the basic opportunities that give them such a capacity.

Reciprocity also prescribes a principle of fair opportunity, which in turn calls for nondiscrimination in the distribution of social resources that are highly valued but may not be essential to living a good life or having a choice among good lives. The principle of fair opportunity rests on the reciprocal claim that discrimination against individuals on morally irrelevant grounds in the distribution of scarce social goods such as professional offices cannot be justified to the individuals who are being discriminated against.

It should not be surprising that these principles resemble those found in many first-order theories. The substantive content of deliberative democracy naturally draws on the same moral sources as other theories, and reflects many of the same conflicts that they generate. Most first-order theories also at least implicitly share the aim of mutual justification. They only appear to reject the aim if they offer justifications for why the demands of reciprocity cannot be met in certain circumstances. If they reject the aim in principle, how can they justify imposing coercive laws and policies on citizens who reject them on moral grounds?
In trying to demonstrate the superiority of their own principles, many democratic theorists tend to emphasize their disagreements with their rivals. In contrast, deliberative democrats at least initially stress agreements. Despite the fundamental conflicts among the theories we have noted, the points of convergence among and within competing first-order theories are substantial. Most theories either directly or indirectly defend the protection of many individual liberties, especially those that are essential to the integrity of persons (the core of the principle of basic liberty). Most theories also claim that if their principles are implemented, all people will secure the opportunity to live a good life, an ideal that expresses the principle of basic opportunity. Similarly, most theorists suggest that their principles support what Gutmann and Thompson term ‘fair opportunity’.

These points of convergence provide the initial content for the substantive principles of deliberative democracy. Although other theorists sometimes seek such convergence, deliberative democrats are better situated to achieve it because they do not try to appropriate merely what they, or their own perspective, regard as valuable in rival theories. Although they do not purport to be neutral among all first-order theories, deliberative democrats do not require that competing first-order theories be rejected. The substantive principles of deliberative democracy have a different status in deliberative democracy: they are morally and politically provisional in ways that leave them more open to challenge and therefore more amenable to democratic discretion.

Reciprocity

The principles of deliberative democracy that Gutmann and Thompson propose (and believe capture the spirit of an adequate deliberative theory) express, in various
forms, the idea of reciprocity. The deliberative principles that flow from reciprocity provide both conditions and content for justifying laws and polices in a democracy. Reciprocity, publicity, and accountability are the chief standards that regulate the conditions of deliberation. Basic liberty, basic opportunity, and fair opportunity are key components of the content of deliberation.  

The basic premise of reciprocity is that citizens owe one another justifications for the institutions, laws, and public policies that collectively bind them. Reciprocity suggests the aim of seeking agreement on the basis of principles that can be justified to others who share the aim of reaching reasonable agreement. Some first order moralities implicitly accept reciprocity, but most do not give it the central role that deliberative democracy does. Deliberative democracy takes reciprocity more seriously than do other theories of democracy, and makes it the core of democratic principles and practice.

Reciprocity is not foundational in deliberative democracy in the way in which principles such as utility or liberty are foundational in first order theories. Reciprocity is not a principle from which justice is derived, but rather one that governs the ongoing process by which the conditions and content of justice are determined in specific cases. Guttmann and Thompson feel that it may be helpful by thinking of the process as analogous to a feature of scientific inquiry. Reciprocity is to justice in political ethics what replication is to truth in science. A finding of truth in science requires replicability, which calls for public demonstration. A finding of justice in political ethics requires reciprocity, which calls for public deliberation. Deliberation is not sufficient to establish justice, but deliberation at some point in history is necessary. Just as repeated replication is unnecessary once the truth of a finding (such as the law of gravity) has been amply
confirmed, so repeated deliberation is unnecessary once a precept of justice (such as equal protection) has been extensively deliberated.

Guided by reciprocity and its fellow principles, the practice of deliberation is an ongoing activity of mutual reason-giving, punctuated by collectively binding decisions. The decisions may take the form of an electoral verdict, a legislative act, or a judicial opinion, but all are situated in a continuing process of justification. It is a process of seeking, not just any reasons, but mutually justifiable reasons, and reaching a mutually binding decision on the basis of those reasons. It is therefore more than discussion, and it is substantive as well as procedural. Among the substantive reasons that citizens consider in this process are some of those expressed in first-order moral theories. This is the source of the instrumental value of deliberation; its tendency to promote mutually justifiable outcomes is part of what justifies the practice itself. Deliberation is valuable in part because it can encourage citizens and their representatives to invoke substantive standards to understand, revise, and resolve moral conflicts in politics. Gutmann and Thompson make note that in this respect, it has epistemic as well as pragmatic value. But these conflicts may not be and usually are not fully resolved, certainly not always in favor of one substantive theory. A further noninstrumental value of deliberation is therefore also an essential and distinctive part of any justification of deliberation. This further value is to be found in the idea of mutual respect that is part of the meaning of reciprocity. Citizens show respect to one another by recognizing their obligation to justify to one another, in terms that permit reasonable disagreement, the laws and policies that govern their public life.
Mutual respect among those who reasonably disagree is a value in itself; and, in turn, it has further beneficial effects for democratic politics. One of these is what Gutmann and Thompson call an economy of moral disagreement. When political opponents seek to economize on their disagreements, they continue to search for fair terms of social cooperation even in the face of their fundamental and often foundational disagreements. They do so by justifying the policies that they find most morally defensible in a way that minimizes rejection of the reasonable positions that they nonetheless oppose on moral grounds. By practicing an economy of moral disagreement, citizens who disagree on one issue are better able to work together on other causes whose goals they share. Citizens ought to be able to agree, for example, that someone’s views on abortion should not affect how she is treated with respect to other public policies. A pro-lifer ought not to favor denying a woman who has had an abortion access to essential medical care. A pro-chooser should not refuse pro-lifers the right to speak against abortion even in front of an abortion clinic.

Together with reciprocity, two other principles specify conditions of democratic deliberation: The principle of publicity requires that reasons-giving be public in order that decisions can be mutually justifiable. The principle of accountability specifies that officials who make decisions on behalf of other people, whether or not they are electoral constituents, should be accountable to those people. Mutually binding decisions cannot be mutually justified if officials are not also accountable to what may be called their moral constituents. The moral constituents of public officials include more than their electoral constituents, and ever more than citizens. They include people who are, in effect, bound by the officials’ decisions even though they may not have had a choice in
making them. People in foreign countries who must live with, for example, the effects of toxic waste exported by our country deserve an accounting from our representatives.

The principles that define the conditions of deliberation resemble some of the principles that procedural theorists put forward. Like some procedural theories, deliberative democracy is a second-order theory. Despite these similarities, however, deliberative democracy, as we have already seen, is not a procedural theory. It can therefore claim two important advantages over proceduralism.

First, deliberative democracy has no problem saying what the majority decides, even after deliberating, need not be right. A majority acts wrongly if it violates basic liberty by requiring a minority to worship as the majority does. Yet through a public and accountable process of fair decision-making, a majority may pass a law requiring a minority to worship in a way that conforms to the majority’s religious beliefs. In a purely procedural conception of democracy, this law would be justified. But it cannot be justified to the minority who do not share the majority’s religion and whose personal integrity the law assaults. It would therefore violate the principle of reciprocity or any ideal of treating every person as a free and equal being.

Second, when procedural theories do accept or reject an outcome favored by a first-order theory, they do so for reasons that are external to the first-order theory. They do not address that theory or its justifications on its own terms, but rather appeal to other considerations such as social stability or fairness. Although these considerations may be moral, they do not engage directly with the moral claims of the position they reject. They therefore fail to treat their opponents with the moral respect reciprocity requires, and they offer less scope for appreciation of opposing views and for modification of one or more
of the opposing views. A procedural theory leaves the competing theories, and their political advocates, in the same moral position in which they began.

Deliberative democracy does not suffer from these difficulties, because it goes beyond proceduralism and explicitly includes substantive first order principles. But some critics may object that by including substantive principles, the theory creates an even more serious problem for itself. They would object that a substantive principle such as religious freedom should not be part of a democratic theory. The critics would agree that religious freedom is a core part of basic liberty and should be protected; but they would argue that democratic theory should not contain any such principles, however justified the principles are on substantive moral grounds. The argument is not so much substantive as definitional: it is about whether the idea of democracy refers only to procedures.

Gutmann and Thompson ask the question, "Is there any reason to define democracy so narrowly that it excludes substantive principles?" They reply, "The reason cannot be because the content of basic liberty or basic opportunity is reasonably contestable, so is the content of principles that are more procedural such as publicity and accountability. Nor can it be because democratic theory is internally inconsistent if it contains substantive as well as procedural principles." There is no inconsistency in claiming that a defensible democracy must defend the religious freedom and other basic liberties of individuals, their right to vote and to hold their representatives accountable, and that it must also find a way of fairly deciding among competing values when they conflict. Without some substantive principles, deliberative democracy could not provide standards for assessing many political practices, including not only the outcomes of procedures but also the procedures themselves. Moreover, it would be morally
incomplete according to its own premise of reciprocity. A democratic constitution that
fails to protect, for example, the basic liberty of citizens would not be justifiable to those
who are bound by it.

Deliberative Democracy: International Perspective

In the modern world, many decisions that a government makes, such as a decision
to go to war, obviously affect many people other than its own citizens. It would therefore
seem that a theory such as deliberative democracy, which emphasizes the need to justify
decisions to people who have to live with the consequences of collective decisions, would
extend its requirements to the international arena. Yet most theorists of deliberative
democracy apply its principles exclusively to domestic systems of government.¹¹

These domestic theorists offer a sensible, practical reason for limiting the reach of
deliberative democracy, essentially why most democratic theorists focus their theories on
one society at a time. As difficult as it is to solve the problem of disagreement in a single
society within a shared legal framework, it is far harder to achieve a justifiable consensus
or mental respect in the even more diverse international sphere, with its many contentious
states and its lack of authoritative overarching institutions. Democratic theorists also give
an ethical reason for this limit, one that can be based on the value of reciprocity: citizens
who are subject to the duties of citizenship, such as military service and taxation, have
the primary right to justification from one another.¹²

In our increasingly interdependent world, however, the practical and ethical
arguments for confining deliberative democracy to the internal policies of single societies
can go only so far. Some deliberate democrats therefore take a more cosmopolitan
position. They point out that the differences between domestic and international society are often exaggerated. Many domestic societies are multicultural, and many lack stable legal frameworks. Deliberative democracy, in any case, is not intended to be a description of current political reality. It is an aspirational ideal. The ideal should of course have some grounding in reality as Gutmann suggests, with trends and institutions that offer some indication that the ideal is not entirely utopian.

The ethical argument for limiting deliberative democracy to particular states may be correct for a wide range of domestic decisions, such as policies on taxation, education, and welfare, but is less obviously correct for other decisions, such as policies on war, trade, immigration, and economic development, which significantly and directly affect people in other countries at least as much as they affect citizens themselves. The decision to go to war against Iraq affected Iraqis more than Americans. Although deliberative democracy, strictly speaking, requires only that justifications be given to citizens who are bound by the decisions, the citizens of foreign countries are no less, and often even more, expected to accept the consequences of the decisions than are the citizens who are legally bound by them. On these issues, the distinction between being bound and being significantly affected begins to erode.

Deliberative Democracy: Moral Constituents

To the extent that public officials in all democracies accept the burden of providing justifications to those who are significant affected by their decisions, foreigners become what Gutmann and Thompson call “moral constituents” even if they are not electoral constituents. On grounds of reciprocity, public officials may ignore the welfare
of foreigners only for reasons those persons could also accept. In this respect, foreigners
stand under the protection of (a sort of virtual) reciprocity. This implication of
deliberative accountability means that there are likely to be some policies that are
acceptable to citizens but to which some foreigners may reasonably object. Iraqi civilians
did not have any claim on Americans to provide health care on an ongoing basis before
the United States overthrew the Iraqi regime and occupied the country. But after the war
many Iraqis may justifiably object if the United States does not provide health care, at
least to those who are victims of the war. And Iraqis may have even stronger claims to
continuing assistance. They are making claims after all, against an invading country that
justified its decisions for war partly on the basis of the benefits it would bring to the Iraqi
people. But even the weaker claim is sufficient to establish that a deliberative democracy
that takes reciprocity seriously should take into account moral and not merely electoral
 constituents.

A public official, who appeals to the welfare of Iraqis, even for the purposes of
justifying a war, is already acknowledging these individuals as his moral constituents.
This kind of appeal, if made in good faith, at least brings citizens of foreign nations into
the moral framework of decision-makers. It recognizes the broader scope of deliberative
accountability, but it is not sufficient. Recognizing foreigners as moral constituents
whose claims should be considered in the deliberative process is not yet recognizing the
importance of including them in the actual deliberations. According to Gutmann and
Thompson, the reason that they should be included in some way in the actual
deliberations is simply that without responding to their views, their “representatives” are
less likely to know whether their welfare is being promoted. If others do not have a voice
in the making of a decision, it is too easy to assume that our decisions will benefit them, especially if the decisions also benefit us.\textsuperscript{14}

If foreigners cannot actually participate in their elections and legislatures, they could still exercise some influence over decisions if their public officials were to some degree more accountable in international forums. Such accountability is difficult to achieve, and is in some respects highly resisted due to the national interest. But in the current world, it cannot credibly be denied that domestic governments and multinational corporations often exercise the kind of political power that calls for some greater degree of public accountability on an international level. Strengthening institutions like the United Nations and the European Union, as well as some of the non-governmental associations in international civil society, could provide a measure of accountability, or at least a surrogate for it, that is now lacking.

A conception of deliberative democracy that takes a more cosmopolitan perspective asks whether these international institutions on balance aid or impede taking the claims of moral constituents into account in political decision-making. It recommends that we try to make international institutions more deliberative, and to the extent that they are, nations should give them greater respect. It also favors domestic forums in which public officials speak for the ordinary citizens of foreign nations, presenting their claims and responding to counterclaims. The purpose of such forums, both international and domestic is to inform citizens and policy-makers alone of the justifiable claims of noncitizens when countries are considering policies that significantly affect noncitizens.

Since the success of democratic accountability depends on the moral capacities of citizens and public officials, elected representatives cannot champion the cause of moral
constituents. The more closely the perspectives of electoral constituents track those of moral constituents, the more nearly the deliberative principle of reciprocity can be relaxed. Although noncitizens may not have the same full claim as citizens on domestic decision-making, they have some substantial claim on major policies that directly affect their lives and basic welfare. In this respect and to this extent, deliberative democracy should promote the globalization of deliberation.

In modern pluralist societies, political disengagements often reflects moral disagreements, as citizens with conflicting perspectives on fundamental values debate the laws that govern their public life. Any satisfactory theory of democracy must provide a way of dealing with this moral disagreement. A fundamental problem confronting all democratic theorists is to find a morally justifiable way of making binding collective decisions in the face of continuing moral conflict.

The solutions that most theorists propose make the problem seem more tractable than it is. Because their solutions require the rejection of rival theories, they discount much of the disagreement that gives rise to the problem in the first place. But if, as in the case in pluralist societies and in current theoretical literature, no single theory can reasonably claim to be morally sovereign, the most difficult part of the problem persists: how to deal with the moral conflict that these competing theoretical perspectives express. Furthermore, the problem is not only that the theories conflict with one another, but also that fundamental disagreement arises even within a single theory.
Deliberative Democracy: Its Opponents

As promising as this idea may seem, however, some scholars believe that it fails to deliver some of what proponents of democracy might hope for. Hence, I will now take into account the opposition, nuances, complexities, and alternative conditions for deliberative democracy. William Nelson\textsuperscript{15} says, "many democrats have stressed the distinctiveness and intrinsic attractiveness of the democratic vision, portraying it as fundamentally at odds with a liberalism that seems to stress individual rights against the state, sharply limiting the power of even democratically elected governments."\textsuperscript{16}

According to these democrats, (such as Gutmann and Thompson), democratic practice and institutions are valuable in their own right and ought to supersede liberal values when the two conflict. These theorists seem to admire majoritarian institutions and a sometimes-messy politics of bargaining and compromise, carried on in legislatures whose power has not been undermined by courts, or other loci of power designed to constrain majorities.

I will first examine Cohen and his alternative ideal of deliberative democracy. Secondly, I will argue alongside the notions of Nelson who believes that the democratic ideal as conceived by some theorists of deliberative democracy has come very nearly to coincide with a major strand in contemporary liberal thought. Moreover, despite the quite practical preoccupations of some deliberative democrats, the theory of deliberative democracy according to Cohen and Nelson, like much contemporary liberal thought, has become quite abstract. As the theory has become more abstract and idealized, its implications for issues of constitutional or institutional design have become less easy to discern. More specifically, the ideal of deliberative democracy does not tell us much
about whether, or why, we ought to adopt and respect conventionally (non-deliberative) democratic institutions; and neither does it offer much support to those democratic theorists who defend more or less majoritarian institutions while strongly opposing the liberal countermajoritarian feature of the United States Constitution.

A number of authors have come to use the term “deliberative democracy” in recent years, but while they draw specific implications from the idea, they often fail to offer any general account. Yet, Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson’s specific aims are somewhat different from Cohen’s, but what they say is compatible with Cohen’s more theoretical ideas. All three see democracy as a distinctively legitimate way of organizing social and political relationships.

Cohen’s views democracy as a “fundamental political ideal”, in the same way which, for Rawls, the notion of a “fair system of social cooperation” is a fundamental ideal. Viewing democracy as a fundamental ideal, Cohen does not seek an independent justification but, rather, offers deliberative democracy as an interpretation of this ideal, which brings out the features that make it attractive. These features are “elements of an independent and expressly political ideal,” not something merely contingently valued, as is liberty within utilitarian theory. If Cohen succeeds, then, his account might be expected to provide the kind of theoretical underpinning on which democrats like Walzer might call upon to defend their conventionally democratic predilections.

In explaining the ideal of deliberative democracy, Cohen proceeds by what he calls “an ideal legislative procedure”: Participants in such a procedure regard themselves as bound only by their own decisions, “not constrained by the authority of prior norms or requirements.” But the decisions, which are to bind them, result from deliberation in
which parties advance reasons for their proposals and take one another’s reasons seriously. Ideal deliberators are motivated to achieve a consensus which all can find acceptable.\textsuperscript{19}

Gutmann and Thompson are clearly more concerned with “real-world” politics, and they do offer what they seem to regard as an independent defense of deliberative practices. “Political decisions,” they say, “are collectively binding, and they should therefore be justifiable, as far as possible, to everyone bound by them.”\textsuperscript{20} Deliberative practices are supposed to serve this end. Guttmann and Thompson may have in mind two different arguments for this conclusion. In part, they seem to think that policies adopted in a deliberative democracy are justifiable to everyone just because they result from a deliberative process. Policies arrived at deliberatively are automatically justifiable. But this seems most plausible if one has in mind not the actual operation of any actual democracy but, instead, the deliberation of ideally reasonable agents in the sort of ideal procedure which Cohen describes. Gutmann and Thompson also think, however, that policies can be more or less justifiable independent of the process that produced them; and they seem to believe that real-world institutions, operating in a deliberative fashion, are more likely than others to uncover and institute these independently justifiable outcomes. Deliberation, characterized by norms of reciprocity, accountability, and publicity, is then justified instrumentally as an effective method for arriving at justifiable policies.

Gutmann and Thompson’s defense of deliberation hovers it seems to Nelson, somewhat unsteadily between those two alternatives. What Gutmann and Thompson as well as Cohen clearly do accept, though, is the idea that issues of policy ought ideally to
be resolved by reasoned discussion among members of society or their representatives. Discussion should aim not just at policies that can gain a bare majority, but on policies on which there can be a consensus. Just what kind of consensus they require is not clear. At one point Cohen speaks of finding “reasons that are persuasive to all.” And that would suggest that we aim at finding a set of principles everyone can accept. An alternative would be that we seek policies, which each member of society can find adequate reason to accept even if different persons have different reasons. The former may be an unreasonably strong requirement, and one which I think all three authors would reject on reflection. For all emphasize that the democratic societies they envision will be marked by considerable moral disagreement—what Cohen refers to as “reasonable pluralism.”

In addition to the idea that policymakers should reason with one another and try to resolve disagreements in mutually acceptable ways, Cohen also insists, as noted above, that deliberation should not be “constrained by the authority of prior norms or requirements.” The reason, I suspect, is that, otherwise, deliberative democracy would not genuinely constitute a form of self-government. If deliberation is constrained by a prior requirement we are governed by that requirement regardless of whether we can agree that it is supported by adequate reasons. And Cohen’s idea of democratic legitimacy is an idea of self-government in the sense of government in accord with “a free and reasoned agreement among equals.” In his essay, however he argues that acceptance of the democratic ideal actually entails accepting certain substantive constraints on outcomes. There seems to be a change in his view, then, though he might well say that his substantive constraints are not prior norms or constraints, for they are justified within the democratic perspective. He seems to think that, if we can see in
advance that no reason could justify imposing a policy on certain persons, then that policy is ruled out on grounds internal to the ideal of democracy. The people remain the final source of authority.

Gutmann and Thompson also accept the idea of substantive constraints on deliberation. In their view, we should not “make deliberation the sovereign guide to resolving moral disagreement in politics.” They claim that, in addition to what we might call the “formal” requirements of reciprocity, publicity, and accountability, democratic deliberation ought also to be constrained by “constitutional” requirements of liberty and opportunity. They do not mean that these requirements should be enforced by independent courts. Instead, since the requirements are not determinate, the deliberative ideal requires that they be interpreted and applied only democratically in light of reasons presented and defended publicly, to everyone. Nevertheless, they do not regard citizens as free to disregard these requirements.

Gutmann and Thompson do not adequately explain why we ought to accept these constitutional constraints. At one point in their book, Democracy and Disagreement, they say that deliberative democracy “needs” principles determining the “content” of deliberation. At a much earlier point they say that, without such principles, democracy will not “protect basic rights.” Perhaps they too think we “need” these principles because policies that do not protect “basic rights” will never be justifiable to everyone, and thus, regardless of the process by which they are adopted, they could not be legitimate. But they do not, to Cohen’s knowledge, make this argument explicitly, even though it is very clear that Gutmann and Thompson explicitly state it. In any case, while they insist on principles of liberty and opportunity they reject the idea that these ought to be interpreted
and enforced by the courts. One of their consistent themes is that, even when we have reason to accept principles or ideals independent of the political process, their application to particular cases is bound to require interpretation, and this is best left to democratic deliberation.

Among defenses of deliberative democracy, there seems to be a broad agreement on the value of self-government, relatively unconstrained by further norms, and understood in terms of a process in which reasonable persons attempt to solve political problems and resolve disagreements in ways that are justifiable to each. There are some questions in the minds of scholars, though, as to just how this idea is supposed to function in moral and political thought about institutions. How much can the theory of deliberative democracy tell us about which actual institutions are justified, whether their outcomes are legitimate, and whether we should comply with them? What feature of the theory tells us that constitutional constraints operate best as “self-constraints” rather than as constraints to be enforced primarily by independent courts?24

I have tried to indicate that this theory can be understood at more than one level as some scholars vindicate. At its most abstract, as in Cohen’s ideal deliberative procedure or his even more abstract “formal conception” of deliberative democracy, the deliberative ideal seems to be something like a metaethical characterization of the idea of legitimacy, just as, say, T.M. Scanlon’s contractualism25 is a metaethical characterization of the idea of moral rightness. At the other extreme, Gutmann and Thompson may view it primarily as a set of specific injunctions concerning how men and women ought to exercise their rights as voters, legislators, and so forth.
Cohen views the ideal deliberative procedure as inherently attractive, and also asserts that institutions should, so far as possible, "mirror" this procedure. These two claims are also logically independent. Perhaps the institutions that most resemble the ideal procedure will function less like the procedure than will other institutions. In some situations, for example, we may do better to invest decision-making authority in a few persons, subject to public scrutiny, rather than to require widespread participation in all decisions. The decision the person makes may more nearly approximate an ideal deliberative consensus. But, if that is right then the deliberative ideal does not offer much direct support to those who insist on majoritarian procedures and who claim that institutions like judicial review are inherently undemocratic.

Nelson: Liberalism

Nelson turns to the question of whether contemporary liberal theory gives rise to a serious criticism of deliberative democracy and if it supports institutional prescriptions seriously at odds with those commonly favored by democratic theorists. Nelson begins with Charles Marmore's useful characterization of liberalism in terms of the kind of problem to which it seeks to respond. The problem is posed by one of the basic facts of "modernity": "that reasonable persons tend naturally to differ and disagree about the nature of the good life." John Rawls, in *Political Liberalism*, proposes a similar account of the defining task of liberalism, together in place of the sometimes-misleading phrase "the good life," Rawls speaks of differing and incompatible "religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines." This issue of moral conflict and the theoretical understanding of how
Having characterized liberalism as a response to the problem set by deep disagreement, Larmore, Rawls, and Nagel all describe this response as a requirement, roughly, that the basic institutions of the state must be defensible in terms that are suitably neutral among the conflicting but not unreasonable doctrines held by citizens.

Liberalism, then, is partially a doctrine about limits on the power of the state, but this point has to be put carefully. It need not mean, for example, that the state should do few things, but only that it refrains from doing certain kinds of things, things that cannot be justified, in appropriate ways to everyone. Moreover, even the ideal of neutrality is not applied uniformly at all levels of government. In at least some liberal theories, a strong requirement of neutrality applies to issues of constitutional design. Constitutional arrangements must be justifiable, so far as possible, without reference to particular, controversial moral or philosophical conceptions, but this requirement does not necessarily apply to proposals that might be put forward and adopted in a democratic legislature.29

Liberals need to offer an account of just why this requirement of neutrality applies differently in different areas of governmental activity, but I will leave that issue to one side. I first want to address the question of why the fact of moral, religious, and philosophical disagreement poses a problem that calls for the kind of solution liberals offer. The answer is that it poses a problem if we also assume that coercive social institutions must be justifiable to everyone, in terms that all can accept without completely abandoning what is distinctive about their individual points of view. Finding
arguments that are acceptable to each, against the background of deep disagreement, is
the task that liberalism purports to solve.

Liberalism begins then with the idea that institutions must be, in some sense,
justifiable to everyone. But this is strikingly similar to the idea that underlies some
theories of deliberative democracy. Gutmann and Thompson, as already noted, seek
“political decisions...that are justifiable...to everyone bound by them.” And Cohen
says “outcomes are democratically legitimate if and only if they could be the object of a
free and reasoned agreement among equals.” Democrats want citizens to advance
reasons for their policies that everyone can accept, and liberals advocate neutral reasons
just because neutral reasons stand a chance of being accepted by persons who otherwise
disagree. But both share the conviction of much modern moral and political thought that
the ultimate standard of the right and the legitimate is what men and women can accept to
agree to. Insofar as liberals and democrats differ, their differences evidently do not lie in
their deepest aspirations. Do their theories otherwise commit them to conflicting ideas
about the design of political institutions?

Liberal theorists differ among themselves in the extent to which they advocate
particular institutions or policies. However, some certainly do make concrete proposals
regarding matters of constitutional design and even economic policy; and it is partly this
tendency to prescribe policy solutions in advance, as it were, that draws the ire of
theorists like Barber and Walzer. These theorists would presumably be content simply to
describe the process that we ought to follow in legislating and then await the results. In
current versions of liberal and democratic theory, however, this contrast is far less sharp.
In the first place, the substantive principles liberals offer (such as “equal liberties” and
“fair equality of opportunity”, are extremely abstract. They seem, as Gutmann and Thompson would certainly agree, hardly more than vague guides to the difficult task of constructing actual institutions. Secondly, contemporary democratic theorists do propose substantive principles: Cohen defends freedom of religion, as does Nagel; and Gutmann and Thompson defend equality of opportunity, as does Rawls.

In *Democracy and Disagreement*, Gutmann and Thompson criticize “constitutional democracy” (Rawls’s theory is their main example) for “the priority it gives to principles of justice over processes of deliberation.” Of course, they themselves think that democratic deliberation ought to be governed by principles of liberty and opportunity; but what they presumably reject is the idea that these principles ought to be interpreted and applied not by deliberative legislatures but by the courts. That the courts ought to have this power, however, though perhaps widely believed, seems to be something that is not dictated by the fundamental assumptions of liberal thought, any more than it is ruled out by the fundamental premises of deliberative democracy.

**Nelson: Contractualist Perspective and Rights**

Nelson asks the question, “Does this theory of deliberative democracy support the practical and institutional judgments commonly associated with belief in democracy? And to what extent does it rule out ostensibly nondemocratic practices and institutions sometimes associated with liberalism?” The answers Nelson has suggested so far have been negative: the rather abstract idea of a deliberative community might, for all we know, be realized to some degree in a great variety of different institutional structures and perhaps not very well in any.
Nelson makes it a point to say that he does not feel this way because he rejects conventional democratic institutions. Nelson does not reject conventional democratic institutions. But it seems to him a difficult matter to say why we ought to establish these institutions, work within them, and accept their decisions as legitimate. The theory of deliberative democracy says that government is legitimate when the people govern themselves, meaning that they are governed, as much as possible, in accordance with a consensus achieved by reasonable discussion. As Nelson noted, however, this does not entail that actual institutions must be conventionally democratic. Nor does it entail that whatever institution utilizes the right to govern people ought to have the force of rights behind its actions. For example, even if it is thought that majoritarian procedures tend to legislate in accordance with the deliberative ideal, that ideal does not seem to entail that majority decisions ought to be respected. For particular decisions may not reflect a reasonable consensus, even if many do.

If belief in democracy is belief in a certain system of rights, if it is the belief, as Walzer puts it, the people have the right to rule, even if they exercise it badly; but if so, then how might those rights be vindicated? The problem of rights is a problem of general interest in moral and political philosophy according to Nelson. To establish majoritarian institutions, or, for that matter, a judicial system is to establish a system of authority. It is to put the power to make certain decisions in the hands of some and, thereby, to take it out of the hands of others. That is what political rights do. It is for that matter what all rights do, from rights to property to rights of the person. The question of how we justify a system of political authority is just an instance of the more general question of how we justify any of these rights.
Nelson poignantly asks the question, “How ought we to think about this problem of justification?” Firstly, he indicates, we need to look at the issue from a more general perspective if we are to consider how these rights relate to other moral considerations. But any moral perspective consistent with the liberal and democratic traditions will hold that legitimate constraints must be acceptable to everyone whom they bind. Within these traditions, there is no ultimate authority beyond what reasonable men and women can justify to one another. Thus, Nelson tries to propose a way to think about rights, and institutions more generally, within a broad contractualist perspective. Nelson considers to what extent the ideas of deliberative democracy significantly affect the specific conclusions he feels that we ought to draw about issues of institutional design.

One of Cohen’s aims, in his essay *Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy*, is to make the case that democracy conceived in deliberative terms, is an intrinsically attractive idea, and not something with mere derivative value as liberty has deliberative value within utilitarianism. Nelson is not inclined to dispute Cohen’s idea, insofar as he limits it to a claim about the value of something like his ideal deliberative procedure. Indeed, though it is ironic in light of the off-and-on disputes between liberals and democrats, I think the good reasons we have for viewing this kind of procedure as an ideal are not unlike the reasons we have for accepting the liberal contractualism of theorists like Rawls and Scanlon.

For those who identify democracy with the actual electoral procedures of many modern states, and for those who would want to increase reliance on majoritarian procedures or on direct, popular decision-making, it seems to Nelson that the theory of deliberative democracy offers little support. It also offers little support to anyone who
wants to claim authority for the actual results of our actual political processes or to anyone who claims that there are special moral reasons always to work within actual democratic institutions. Perhaps, as suggested by Nelson, there are such reasons, at least if contemporary institutions do represent a fair and reasonable distribution of decision-making power and if the exercise of that power does not violate clear, independent moral principles. If there is an obligation to respect democratic procedures, however, Nelson thinks the ideal of deliberative democracy does not, by itself, explain it.\textsuperscript{34}

Yet, Nelson does not say that it is irrelevant. He mentions that if we start with the assumption of reasonable pluralism, together with the idea that institutional constraints or rules must be justifiable to each, we can make a pretty direct case for institutions that are largely majoritarian. For persons who disagree about many matters of morality and religion will have all the more reasons to care about just how decision-making authority is distributed. A majoritarian system, with "one person, one vote," and with some judicial protections against excessive governmental intrusions, is just the kind of system that can serve as a natural fallback if we seek a system justifiable to all. Nelson concludes on the note that when we start with wide disagreement, that is no reason not to seek further agreement where we can get it, and, where we cannot, to seek promises that at least rest on greater mutual understanding and respect.

Monique Deveaux makes it clear in her book titled, \textit{Cultural Pluralism and Dilemmas of Justice}\textsuperscript{35} that when strong consensus is the ultimate goal of public deliberation, that emphasis reflects a lack of respect for citizens' social, cultural, and ethical differences. From the vantage point of concerns about justice for cultural minorities, linking deliberation too closely to the goal of consensus presents at least two
related problems, according to Deveaux. She states that, first, the ideal of consensus presupposes that agents will come to agree on norms and proposals in part because their differences in terms of divergent views and interests are not so great that they cannot be resolved by good, publicly accessible arguments. Deveaux further mentions that this supposition introduces unexamined (and possibly unjust) limits to the form and degree of pluralism that can be accepted in liberative democratic politics. And second, some theorists of discourse ethics and deliberative democracy link the ideal of consensus to the view that citizens' deliberations should always be oriented toward the common good; in doing so, they fail to take full account of the citizens' social differences.  

The inappropriateness of the goal of consensus for deliberation in plural societies is underscored by deliberative theorists' proposals for what to do when consensus breaks down in deliberative politics: faced with the prospect that deliberation might not always result in consensus, some proponents of deliberative democracy simply cite majoritarian voting as the default solution to seeming irresolvable conflicts. Entrenched disagreements often concern culturally contested norms and practices, and these in turn may reflect differences in interests and in power. Consequently, a simple retreat to the majoritarian principle may serve only to further marginalize the voices of members of cultural minorities. Abandoning a strong ideal of consensus for deliberative democracy need not amount to the capitulation to endless disputes, however. In some cases, a legitimate agreement may consist of an agreement to disagree, hopefully reflecting a deeper understanding of the basis of the dispute than existed before deliberation and a provisional account of how to proceed from this dissonance.
I am in agreement with Deveaux in her statement that, "few writers have offered suggestions for how we might go about constructing open and democratic deliberative procedures that take adequate account of issues of power and inequality." Still, while the theory of deliberative democracy may be speculative in the eyes of some, it provides alternative conditions for democracy in an attempt to ameliorate the clash of Islam and democracy. Gutmann and Thompson's approach can be modified by Deveaux's suggestions. We now move to Chapter Three, where, as stated in the introduction, I focus on my attempt to define the long history of Islam and democracy, their distinctions, variances, and complexities.
Endnotes


8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.


12 Gutmann and Thompson, “Democracy and Disagreement,” 13, 39, 50.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.


16 Ibid.


19Ibid., 21-23.

20Gutmann and Thompson, Democracy and Disagreement, 13, 39, 50.


22Ibid., 103.

23Gutmann and Thompson, Democracy and Disagreement, 13, 39, 50.

24Nelson, “Democracy,” 188.


30Gutmann and Thompson, Democracy and Disagreement, 13, 39, 50.


33Ibid

34Ibid.


36Ibid.


38Ibid.
CHAPTER THREE

ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY

The focus of this Chapter is an attempt to define the long history of Islam and democracy, their distinctions, variances, and complexities. This attempt will provide the discussion for imagining the prospects for an Islamic democracy while taking into account the nuances, problems, and alternatives in the rationale for a favorable synergy between Islam and democracy. It is noted that the intellectual, religious, political, and cultural currents cannot be pinpointed to one sole common denominator.

I will begin with outlining and defining mobile beliefs capturing the realist argument. I will demonstrate the compatibilities of Islam and democracy to the extent that both ideas are flexible if defined broadly enough. These mobile beliefs will lead into the discussion of imagined prospects for an Islamic democracy, a pluralist democracy, and the challenge of pluralism. Yet, one cannot speak of an Islamic government without an examination of (1) Islam and the shari‘a, (2) Islam and the ruler, and (3) Islam and sovereignty. Indeed, all three issues will be examined. I will conclude this chapter by presenting and examining two opponents of Islam and democracy: one from the West and one from the Muslim World. Specifically, I will evaluate the reasons of opposition as espoused by scholars Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis.
The realist argument in favor of consistency and generating good will toward the United States does not exhaust the range of arguments in favor of encouraging democratization in the Muslim world. There is also the American aspiration to do the morally right thing, shared by many people outside the foreign policy establishment and by a surprisingly large number within it. In fighting communism, it was always possible to argue that compromises with respect to the undemocratic behavior of particular allies could be justified by the greater goal of defeating communism; perhaps some of the time this was so.

Cold War habits live on, however, and this has led to a similar attempt to justify America’s alliances with Muslim dictators. The argument that we must support dictators or else accept the role of Islamist can be couched in moral terms, and it sometimes is, especially with respect to the rights of women. Yet this argument makes sense only if dictatorships are better than governments that might replace them. It is unfair to compare the dictatorships that exist to the world Islamist government that can be imagined, because those Islamists governments might never come into existence if citizens of Muslim states choose to vote for moderate Islamists or secular governments. Even if a radically Islamist government were to come to power through free elections that included women, it is still not obvious that such a government would be morally worse than the unelected dictatorships and monarchies that currently prevail. If women could vote, free elections in Saudi Arabia would at least produce a government that allowed women to drive, which is more than they can do now.
It emerges that very little in the way of moral argument can justify a policy of continuing to back autocratic government when we have the option of exerting pressure toward democracy. Similarly bankrupt is the isolationism that crops up when the right decides it cannot be bothered with the needs of oppressed foreigners, or the left prefers to keep its hands clean rather than run the risk of neocolonialism. At this late date, no one can reverse either America's superpower status or the pervasive interaction between peoples and states that we call globalization. The United States and the West are already involved in the politics of Muslim states and the lives of Muslims. Western ideas like democracy are affecting the Muslim world, and so is the Western policy that eschews democratization in practice.

The moral dimension of the argument for democratization must not be treated as a luxury that cannot be afforded in an uncertain world as moral ideas are deeply interwoven in the fabric of America's position as a superpower. Today, the familiar observation that morality and self interest are both at work in American foreign policy has a much richer meaning than is usually supposed. What makes America a superpower, imitated and admired even as it is feared and reviled, is not only its unmatched military strength, but its claim to embody democracy and freedom. To the extent that the Untied States gives the lie to that claim, it weakens itself as a superpower. This is so in the practical sense that inconsistency makes it more difficult to persuade other countries or peoples to do what the United States wants, and also in the deeper sense that America weakens its own resolve when it fails to live up to the values that define it. In the eyes of the world, America stands for the idea of democracy, an idea that can and must be universalized if it is to make good on its underlying values of liberty and equality. When, far from
encouraging the spread of democracy, America impedes it, it becomes a lesser America.

Spreading the idea of democracy serves America's pragmatic interests because it encourages others to see themselves through a prism of values that brings them closer to the way that America wants to see itself. At the same time, encouraging democracy, in the sense of allowing people to choose leaders and government themselves, enables the United States to fulfill the moral values of liberty and equality that lie at the heart of any democracy worthy of the name.

This distinctive combination of realism and idealism merges practicality and morality. It demands that we improve our material condition and status in the service of producing the morally correct outcome. Safety, wealth, and, yes, power are worthwhile only to the extent that they enable us to live in a way that makes us proud. The case of encouraging democratization in the Muslim world, then, is one of these where the right policy and the instrumental policy are mutually dependent. By adopting this policy, the United States can produce results that will enable Americans to look in the mirror and see what, deep down, they want and need to see, a foreign policy informed by the values that Americans would want applied to themselves.

There is a persistent, if sometimes, disingenuous, counterargument that is often made against Western intervention to promote democracy in non-Western countries: that democracy is not a one-size-fits-all system of government but is intimately tied to particular Western values, ideals, and historical conditions. The argument is not simply that democracy does not suit non-Western contexts but that it would be hegemonic and wrong, even colonialist or imperialist, of the West to impose democracy where it is not a “natural growing” form of government. I have perhaps invited this objection by explicitly

61
connecting the encouragement of democracy with America’s superpower status. Regarding most of the Muslim world, however, this argument cannot possibly be convincing.

The handful of Muslim countries, most notably Saudi Arabia that do not have a constitutional structure devoted to democracy may make this argument worth more candor and force. But even they must conform to the argument that many countries lacking indigenous traditions of democracy have usefully adopted democracy in the modern era. At all events, the Saudis can do no more than assert that their citizens do not want democracy. They show no interest in putting the question up for general discussion. If a referendum, or even a freely conducted opinion poll, revealed that, after election, the Saudi public did not want a greater say in ruling itself, then maybe it would be wrong to pressure Saudi Arabia to adopt democratic institutions. But there has been no such poll or referendum, and part of the purpose of the Saudi argument that countries should be left to their own devices is to make sure that there never is. The Saudis also say that gradual change is the hallmark of their society, and that they therefore must be left to proceed at their own pace. Yet history shows that the Wahhabization of Saudi Arabia actually happened rather rapidly, and subsequent changes in the Saudi state structure were only gradual when it was in the interests of the monarchy to make them so.

This is not to assume that every country in the world necessarily wants Western-style democracy. Democracy may not be the only just way to a legitimate government, and many democracies in the real world turn out not to be very just. The point is that as a moral matter, Muslims, like everybody else, should have the opportunity to make basic decisions about government for themselves. The fact that a country is not democratic,
however, is not good evidence that its citizens do not wish for it to be more democratic. If Muslims choose democratic government, then they ought to be assisted in achieving it. If, on the other hand, they choose something else, that, too, should be permitted to exist undisturbed.

To propose that most Muslims would prefer greater democratization to what they have now is not to insist that they wish to be Americanized. The institutions of Islamic democracy will not look precisely the same as American democratic institutions, nor should they, unless that is what Muslims want. Democracy, even in the West, comes in many guises. Democracies disagree about how much liberty and equality citizens should have, and how best to guarantee them. These are legitimate subjects of debate within democratic structures, and one would expect them to be debated in Islamic democracies as well.

It is a feature of ideas that they can grow and develop in contexts very far from the ones in which they first came into being. Indeed, if the category of mobile ideas has any social historical impact, it is because such ideas cannot be restrained within, or limited to the environments where they began. It is therefore misguided to criticize an idea on the sole ground that it has convinced people of something new and different from what they believed before.

V.S. Naipaul adopts a form of this view when he suggests that Islam has had a particularly deleterious effect in non-Arab countries like Indonesia, Pakistan, and Iran. He call non-Arabs “converts” to Islam even when that conversion took place more than a thousand years ago, and he blames many of the difficulties within these countries on the domination of preconversion cultures by mobile Islam. Naipaul’s argument seems
incorrect when one realizes that many, perhaps most, cultures and civilization are based on interactions between different ideas; and after all, the Arabs themselves converted to Islam from their preexisting faiths. The argument seems no better when applied to degenerate democracy that has taken root in non-Western countries. True, Indians may in some sense be seen as “converts” to democracy. In this sense, though, so were America’s founding fathers, and the black Jacobians of the Haitian revolution. Perhaps everyone who adopts a mobile idea is a convert to it. There is nothing troubling in that notion. The worth of ideas is measured by their content and their effects, not by who had them first.

Islam and democracy can be seen as compatible to the extent that both ideas are flexible. If democracy were restricted to requiring the absolute sovereignty of the people, it would lack the ability to appeal to people and to cultures that do not place humans at the center of the universe. But democracy has flourished even where humanism was not the dominant mode of thinking. Modern Western democracy grew up among pious Christians, many of them staunch Calvinists who emphasized man’s sinful and fallen nature, and who themselves grappled with the relationship between democracy and divine sovereignty. Most Americans today probably believe that God, not man, is the measure of all things. The idea of the rule of the people has been flexible enough to mean that the people or God or nature or nothing is sovereign. On any of these views, the people still govern themselves within the area delineated by their capacities and rights.

Islam has demonstrated a comparable degree of flexibility in its essence. Acknowledging that God is sovereign turns out to mean different things to different people. It has encompassed the idea of free will to some Muslims, while others have thought that a sovereign God must leave nothing to chance or choice. Rationalist Muslim
philosophers such as Louise Marlow and Ann Elizabeth Meyer thought that God was sovereign in the sense that he was the First Mover. Sufi mystics believed that God was sovereign in that God was Truth itself. Islam has been compatible with a number of different systems of government. The flexibility inherent in the essential Muslim idea of acknowledging God's sovereignty enables Islam to be compatible with democracy if broadly defined.

Imagined Prospects for an Islamic Democracy

In what follows, I will present a very brief summary of the theory of Islamic democracy sufficient to connote just a beginning of a full-fledged account of an Islamic democracy, ruled by elected leaders responsible to law and the people. There are various ways in which Islamic democracies might shape the relationship between elections, legislatures, and Islamic governance while remaining true both to some form of democracy and to some form of Islam.

One possible Islamic state would guarantee equal rights and freedom of religion to all its citizens, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. What would make such a state Islamic might be simply a declaration that Islam is the state's official religion, and perhaps some commitment to this ideal in the symbolism of flags, oaths of office, prayers of invocation, and state support of mosques. Assume that all these activities were decided by a large majority vote, and that Islamic law did not form the basis for the state's laws.

Such a state could surely be counted as a democracy. The existence of an official religion does not necessarily infringe on any basic right. That does not mean that the declaration would have no effect on non-Muslims, who are being told that, in some sense, their state chooses to ally itself with beliefs they do not share. Non-Muslims would likely
feel their minority status keenly. They might feel awkward, uncomfortable, or even insecure. But as long as the decision to make Islam the state religion followed a democratic principle of collective self-government, the declaration of Islam as the official religion would be democratically justified.

A second possible Islamic democracy might adopt a provision in its constitution announcing that classical Islamic law shall be a source of law for the nation. This is a very popular suggestion among Islamists as a step toward the creation of an Islamic state. Pakistan has versions of such provisions in its constitution. If the people have in fact chosen this constitutional provision legitimately, then there is a sense in which this is nothing more than a constitutional decision following from electoral politics and expressing values shared by the great majority. In another sense, though, the injection of Islamic law or its values into the state’s legal system creates a backdrop for laws that will be passed later. That *shari’a* (Islamic Law) backdrop brings Islam and traditional or believing Muslims into a potential alliance with the state. Muslims might be able to relate to the laws of the state differently from non-Muslims. Even if we assume that making *shari’a* not a formal source of law means that the people could choose not to adopt classical Islamic law whenever they wanted, the constitution provision still sets the default, making it easier for Muslims than for other people to get laws passed that accord with their preferred values. This places non-Muslims (as well as secular Muslims, sectarian Muslims, and perhaps those who argue that *shari’a* must evolve) at a distinct disadvantage in the political sphere even if they get to vote and participate in elections.

A third possible Islamic state might adopt Islamic law as its exclusive legal system. The legislature could accomplish this by enacting a system, law by law, and a
code of rules that correspond to Islamic law. According to Hsan Kayali (Ottoman Scholar), there actually is such a code in existence, enacted in the later phases of the Ottoman Empire in an attempt to bring codified order to the classical Islamic law. This code, known as the *Majalla*, was used as a model for other codes of law in the Muslim world. In practice, the legislature would have to choose just one interpretation of Islamic law for each of the provisions that it chose. This approach sounds as if it is consistent with democratic practice, since it involves a series of decisions by a democratically elected legislature.

Alternatively, an Islamic democracy might adopt Islamic law across the board by enacting a constitutional provision stating that classical Islamic law shall be the law of the land. Classical Islamic law is more like old English common law than like statute law. Instead of statute books full of hundreds of thousands of codified legal rules, classical Islamic law consist of the opinions of scholars and judges throughout the ages, recorded in everything from books of legal theory, to reports of actual cases and decisions, to handbooks of hypothetical cases. The scholars disagree, and the diversity of opinions on many legal questions is one of the glories of the classical Islamic legal tradition. All these legal sources reflect interpretations of the *Qur'an* and the sayings and actions of Muhammad and his companions, but the interpretations often differ. Saudi Arabia uses its full-blown system of classical Islamic law except where royal decrees and statutes that govern corporate business have supplemented the law and tax law as well as oil matters. So when a Saudi judge considers a difficult case, he (and it is always he) must make sense of this broad body of knowledge and distill it to its essence for the particular case.
Such a system puts power in the hands of unelected judges, not the people. But the same is true of English or American common law, in which the law cannot be found in just one code or statute book, but must be discovered or invented by judges who look to the body of received opinions to decide the case before them. Common law still governs many legal matters in the United States, from traffic accidents to breaches of contract and even some crimes, without our believing that it upsets our democracy. The reason is that the legislature has voted to adopt the common law, just as the people have chosen to apply Islamic law across the board in our imagined Islamic democracy. So long as there are continuing elections and a changeable constitution, the people could step in and change that rule if they wanted to, by changing their constitution. If the people never had a chance to decide whether to follow Islamic law or not, then they lacked democratic choice. Saudi Arabia is not a democracy, because there was never a vote by the people to adopt Islamic law. But if a people democratically enacted a constitution that provided for the use of classical Islamic law, then we might be able to say that this choice was democratic. This is true even though the specific provisions of Islamic law derive from religious ideals and values. Western laws against murder, theft, and adultery (still on the books in many U.S. states) can all be traced to the Ten Commandments.

Islam and Pluralist Democracy

The debate about Islam and democracy in the region has, over the last decade, witnessed some fresh thinking and considerable movement on the ground. A growing number of Muslims, including a good many Islamism activists, have called for pluralist democracy, or at least some of its basic elements: the rule of law and the protection of
human rights, political participation, government control and accountability. The terms and concepts used are often rather vague and imprecise. Some speak of *shura*, the idealized Islamic concept of participation qua-consultation; others do not hesitate to call for democracy; and others may still qualify it to be "Islamic democracy," just as in the 1950's and 1960's when some talked about "Arab" or "Islamic socialism."

This phenomenon raises serious questions, political as well as methodological. Are Islamist activists sincere when they declare their democratic convictions, or do they merely hope to gain popular support and reach power through democratic elections? In either case it is significant that they should think such pronouncements could help them. Gudrun Kramer focuses in on the theoretical aspects of the issue: Assuming that they are acting in good faith and that they have adopted democracy as their "strategic option," is there an Islamic path to a pluralist democratic society? And how can it be analyzed?

According to Kramer, there is among Muslims an explicit debate on the subject which directly compares Islamic modes of political organization to Western-style pluralist democracy, usually with the intent of proving Islam's superiority to Western concepts in moral as well as practical terms, and that indeed Islam served as a source and model from which democratic essentials such as the rule of law or the concept of the social contract were taken by European thinkers of the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment. Kramer makes mention of the fact that there are a sizable number of comparative studies looking at specific concepts such as sovereignty, the social contract or the separation of powers "in Islam," in the West and in contemporary Arab politics.

Contrary to much of the literature on the subject, it is not possible to talk about Islam and democracy in general, but only about Muslims living and theorizing under
specific historical circumstances. According to Kramer, "this may sound evident enough, and yet it is all too often ignored, not least because many of the Muslim authors themselves present their views as ‘the position of Islam’ on any given matter." There are certainly essentials of the faith accepted by all who consider themselves to be Muslims and who are recognized as such by their coreligionists. But these thinkers differ considerably as to how an Islamic society should be organized. What is required, therefore, is specificity.

Kramer bases many of his remarks on those whom he considers to be voices of the Sunni Arab mainstream. They are generally ranked as conservative, though some are seen as progressive or "enlightened" thinkers. Such members include the Egyptian and the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhoods and of the Tunisian Islamist movement led by Rashid al-Ghannushi as well as individual authors committed to the so-called Islamic awakening, like Muhammad ‘Ammara, Fathi ‘Uthman and others. They clearly speak only for certain segments of the broad Islamic movement, representing the male educated urban elite and at the same time scriptural rather than the mystical or so-called popular Islam. It is in these circles that the question of Islam, *shura*, and democracy is being discussed.

There is general agreement among these authors that Islam is comprehensive or, as the commonly used modern formula has it, that it is its religion and state, or religion and world. This formulation signals the rejection of secularism as it was advocated by the Egyptian scholar ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Raziq in his book, *Islam and the Roots of Government*, published in 1925, shortly after the abolition of the caliphate. Almost three generations later, his claims that Muhammad was a prophet and not a statesman, that Islam is a
religion and not a state, and that Islam should have nothing to do with politics, still
provoke outrage.

The vocal denunciation of secularism however does not imply that these authors
make no distinction between the spheres of religion proper and of worldly affairs,
between the sacred and the profane, the eternal and the temporal. In fact, just this
distinction is reflected in Islamic legal theory (fiqh), which distinguishes between the
‘ibadat, involving a person’s relation with his or her creator (essentially the five pillars of
Islam: the profession of faith, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage), and the
mu’amalat, covering all other aspects of economic, political and family life. While the
‘ibadat are eternal and immutable, the mu’ulumat can be adapted to changing
requirements of time and locality, provided the results conform to the word (nass) and
spirit (maqasid) of the shari’a. What they envisage, then, are two differentiated spheres
of human life and activity: one revolving around faith, worship and the other around
worldly affairs, both of them subject to the precepts of Islam. Islam in turn comprises
faith, ethics, and law as set forth in the Qur’an, exemplified by the life of the Prophet
Muhammad and his Companions (the sunna), and later developed by Muslim theologians
and jurists into the shari’a.

Islam and Shari’a

There is further agreement that the hallmark of a truly Islamic system is the
application of the shari’a and not any particular political order, the historical caliphate
included. What matters is the purpose of the state and the principles it rests upon. These
principles are to be found in the Qur’an and sunna, and they include most notably justice,
mutual consultation (shura), equality, freedom, and the struggle in the path of God (jihad). The militants go even further, declaring that any Muslim who does not apply God’s judgment and follow divine law is to be considered and fought as a sinner, a tyrant, and an infidel.\textsuperscript{11}

No sharp distinction is usually made between Islam and the shari‘a, and as a rule both terms are used interchangeably. In accordance with what Kramer calls the, “functional theory of government,” which sees the shari‘a as the cornerstone of an Islamic order and government as merely the executive of God’s law, the debate has shifted as to how the shari‘a is to be defined, whether as a comprehensive set of norms and values regulating human life down to the minutest detail, or as a set of general rules of good life and moral behavior aiming at people’s welfare on earth and their salvation in the hereafter (which still leaves room for human interpretation).

There is general consensus that the shari‘a is comprehensive but at the same time flexible and therefore suited, as the formula goes, to all times and places. That leads to the crucial distinction between an untouchable and immutable core that has been decisively refined by God’s word (nass) and flexible elements or in modern terminology derived by human reason from this core, following the rules of Islamic jurisprudence (ijtihad).

This distinction provides one of the criteria by which to delineate radicals and progressives, conservatives and modernists, and it is vital to the debate about Islam and the state. The aim of “enlightened” modernist reformers has of necessity been to define the scope of human interpretation as extensively as possible, an endeavor which was characterized somewhat uncharitably by Malcolm Herr as the attempt to define the
When it comes to politics, even Muslim Brothers who, according to their social views, would qualify as conservatives, hold remarkably modern ideas: “The shari’a to be applied requires social organization and a state.” But God in his wisdom left the details of political organization to the Muslim community to decide according to its needs and aspirations. Government and politics are part of the mu’amalat that are to be regulated so as to realize the common good which, if properly understood, coincides with the purposes of the shari’a. The logic of this argument takes them quite close to the conclusions of ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Raziq, whose theoretical premises, in what is probably an attempt to establish orthodox credentials for what might otherwise be considered a dangerously modern approach, they so emphatically denounce. For them, unlike for him, Islam is religion and state, and yet, for them as for him, the precise form of government is left to human reason to define.

This line of argument results in an apparent paradox which has not gone unnoticed by thoughtful observers: While the state is considered to be central to having Islamic law enforced, its form and organization are declared to be secondary, a matter not of substance but of technique. This has to be seen in relation to the common assertion that there is no prohibition for Muslims to adapt techniques and modes of organization of non-Islamic origin, provided they do not adopt any un-Islamic values. If government organization is a matter of convenience and mere technique, then the adoption of democracy, or of certain democratic elements, may be acceptable, recommended, or mandatory, provided it does not lead to the neglect or violation of Islamic norms and values.
At the core of much contemporary writing are a number of shared assumptions: that all people are born equal, having been installed as God's vicegerents on earth; that government exists to ensure an Islamic life and enforce Islamic law; that sovereignty ultimately rests with God alone, who has made the law and defined good and evil, the licit and illicit; that the authority to apply God's law has been transferred to the community as a whole, which is therefore the source of all powers; and that the head of the community or state, no matter whether they be called imam, caliph, or president, is the mere representative, agent, or employee of the community that elicits, supervises and if necessary deposes him, whether directly or via its representatives.¹⁴

This simplified scheme of government does not constitute a sharp break with classical Sunni doctrines, which, in contrast to Shi'i positions, declared that the caliphate was based on the consensus of the Muslim community, not on any preordained divine order. But compared even to the widely quoted treatises of Ibn Taimiyya (d. 1328)¹⁵, with their emphasis on the centrality of the shari'a, modern positions mark a definite shift of emphasis away from the person of the rule, and the duty of obedience and acquiescence for the sake of peace and order, even under unjust rule, to the authority of the community and the responsibility of every individual believer. This shift no doubt reflects the impact of modern liberal ideas as well as the decline and eventual abolition in 1924 of the historical caliphate.

According to Kramer, what emerges as the core concern of modern Muslims is to check and limit arbitrary personal rule and to replace it with the rule of law. That had already been the preoccupation of 19th century Arab and Ottoman constitutionalists, ranging from Khair al-Din al-Tunisi to Namik Kemal. It is basic to the advocates of
hakimiyya, God’s sole sovereignty, who radically deny the capacity of men and women to distinguish, by the light of their intelligence, between right and wrong, licit and illicit. In an interesting twist, they frequently present their argument in democratic guise: given that all people are created equal and that consequently no one has the right to impose their will on others, and given that people are too weak to control their passions and desires, a higher authority is needed to keep them in check. This higher authority is divine law, binding on all, high and low, rich and poor. The submission to God’s sovereignty as demonstrated in the strict and exclusive application of the shari’a, therefore, signifies not just the (only genuine) rule of law, but also the (only genuine) liberation of man from servitude to man.

Seen from this perspective, Islam serves as a theology of liberation. And it is in this sense that the writings of Sayyid Qutb or Taqi al-Din al-Nabl have been understood by men and women in search of justice and disillusioned with the signs of all-pervading despotism and corruption. For the critical observer, by contrast, the utopian character and very real authoritarian streak of this argument is all too obvious. For whom is it, after all, that god’s law is heard and applied, if not men and women, ruled by their passions and subjected to the limitations of their understanding? Law, it has been stated often enough, does not apply itself, but is applied by fallible human beings. Still it remains that for contemporary Islamists, both radical and reformist, tyranny is the main enemy, no matter whether it be defined in strictly secular terms or on religious grounds.

In this logic, it is no longer very important whether the ruler be called caliph, imam, or simply head of the state or president. While certain groups like the Islamic Liberation Party or leading Algerian Islamists still propagate the restoration of the
caliphate, many Muslim Brothers will use the term caliphate for what in fact is nothing more than a modern presidency. The underlying conception is in all cases similar: The ruler is the agent and representative of the Muslim community, entrusted with executing God’s law. He has no religious authority whatsoever, though some of his tasks, such as the implementation of the shari’a or the propagation of jihad, would by Western standards be classified as religious. While the state rests on a religious foundation, its leadership carries no religious sanction. It is to emphasize this distinction, which is not all that difficult to make but often neglected, that many Muslim authors insist on saying that the ideal Islamic state is not a theocracy, which would be ruled by men of religion or a rule of divine grace, but that it is a civil or, to be more precise, a lay state.

Compared to classical treatises then, the role and function of the ruler have been re-evaluated and distinctly devalued. At the same time, there is heavy emphasis on the need for strong leadership, though this is usually justified in strictly secular terms. The preoccupation with forceful leadership, unity, strict loyalty, and obedience is mirrored in the organizational structure of virtually all Islamist movements, from the relatively moderate Muslim Brotherhood to the militant underground which in their internal affairs do not adhere to democratic principles.

The Challenge of Pluralism

Characteristic of much contemporary political writing is its individualists, activists bent on the attempt to translate ethical and religious duties into principles of political responsibility and participation. As Kramer puts it, three elements are basic to this effort: the Qur’anic injunction to enjoy good and prohibit evil, the Prophet’s appeal to
give counsel, and the duty to consult (shura) that is based on both the Qur'an and the
sunna. They are interpreted so as to make political commitment and participation the
religious duty of every single individual as well as the entire community. As a result,
politics is literally sacralized, and at the same time ethical and religious duties and
injunctions are systematically politicized, extended, and institutionalized. In a process
that clearly betrays the impact of modern (Western) political ideas, the transition is made
from a limited involvement of the community in electing the leader via shura and the
oath of allegiance, to a constitutional system involving continuous consultation and
permanent control over the ruler and over government in general, which are now held
responsible not only to God but also to their electorate.

Considerable thought has been given to the potential means and instruments of
political control. Going beyond al-Mawardi's (d.1058) concept of a separation of
functions via delegation from the ruler, more and more authors are inclined to accept the
need for a separation of powers in which the executive (the ruler) and the legislature (the
shura council or parliament) effectively keep each other in check. In accordance with the
theory of divine sovereignty, they often add that in an Islamic text legislation is in actual
fact confined to the mere "application" of the shari'a. The independence of the judiciary
is generally acknowledged, and some writers suggest the institution of a higher
constitutional court or council to guarantee the rule of law.

Much attention is given to the principle of shur'a, which in the early history and
tradition of Islam meant nothing more than consultation in all matters private and public.
It is now presented as the functional equivalent of Western parliamentary rule, and as the
basis of an authentic Islamic democracy. A wide range of questions remain controversial,
whether consultation is a duty of the ruler, and whether it is bound by the decisions of those consulted; whether they are men (there is in general little mention of women) of his own choice or the elected representatives of the community, individuals only or members of formal institutions such as political parties, religious specialists only or other experts and community leaders as well; whether they decide by majority rule; and whether all matters of general import have to be subjected to consultation.

Most authors tend to regard shura as both required and binding, to accept the principle of majority decision, and to see it as a formal process and an institution, that is, a shura council made up of elected members, who ought to include specialists in Islamic law as well as in other fields. What they have in mind, then, is a council of experts deciding on the grounds of "objective" (Islamically valid) right and wrong, judging on the basis of the common good only, and not a political assembly representing conflicting opinions and interest. The ideal amounts to technocracy headed by the Just Ruler.

The point is an important one, for it highlights the difficulties most contemporary Muslim authors have in envisaging consultation and participation as a genuinely political process involving interest representation, competition, and contestation. It reflects the continued prevalence of moral rather than a political discourse, strictly speaking. The ideals of unity, consensus, and a balanced harmony of groups and interests, often associated with the theological concepts of tawhid, the Oneness of God, are still paramount. In the debate about pluralism, there is general recognition that God created people to be different, and that therefore differences of opinion are natural, legitimate, and even beneficial to humankind and the Muslim community, provided they remain within the confines of the faith and common decency.
Most authors would protest the claim that Islam protects human rights, and that it fully guarantees the freedom of thought and conscience, within the framework of Islam. They generally concede that it is legitimate and may even be necessary to organize opinion, consultation, and control so as to make them effective upon a strong executive, and that therefore, there are grounds for legitimizing associations and political parties, on condition that they do not represent particular whims, passion, and interests, again within the framework of Islam only. The bottom line remains: there can be no toleration of, nor freedom for, the tainted of Islam, the hypocrite, the skeptic, and the atheists, the libertarian, and the subversive. As long as there is no certainty as to who defines the “framework of Islam,” and where exactly power and interest come into play, pluralism and democracy remain in jeopardy.

These positions are ambiguous and less clear than one would hope, but they are not as antagonistic to the values of equality, pluralism, and democracy as the statements of some of the most forceful advocates of radical political Islam, such as the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb or the Algerian Ali Belhaj, would suggest. The mainstream position is remarkably flexible with respect to modes of political organization, providing for institutionalized checks on the ruler in the form of a separation of powers, parliamentary rule, and in some cases even multipartyism. It is more advanced than is often acknowledged concerning the protection of human rights. These are generally founded on the duties towards God but nevertheless widely seen as part of the common heritage of all humankind. Indeed, the protection of individual rights and civil liberties from government supervision and interference, repression, and torture figures highly in Islamist theory. But mainstream attitudes remain highly restrictive with regard to the
freedom of political, religious, and artistic expression, if that involves the right to freely express one's religious feelings, doubts included, or to give up Islam altogether.

Recent debates on the status of non-Muslims, emphasizing the shared rights and duties of all inhabitants of the land, suggest that a concept of citizenship may be gradually evolving. It is possibly in the domain of gender relations that change is least perceptible. Mainstream positions on women continue to be strictly conservative. While they subscribe to the equality of men and women as human beings, they still consider women to be at the same time threatening and vulnerable, in need of special protection and ultimately inferior to men in terms of their mental strength and physical condition. Whereas slavery is no longer an issue in contemporary debate, polygamy and divorce continue to be discussed along strictly traditional lines.

People like Belhaj and Qutb have tended to set the tone of this discussion, amplified by Western media treatment and by the strategy of repression pursued by the governments of Tunisia and Algeria. This is not the whole story, especially in the Arab East (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen). It is important to listen to the non-violent voices of political Islam as well as to the radicals. The Muslim Brothers repressing urban middle class values, interests and aspirations, are at least as important socially and politically as al-Jihad, and the blending approach they represent will likely become more generalized. Doubts about the credibility of certain actors, while justified, should not invalidate efforts to discover what the larger groups as well as influential intellectuals think. Their writings are as relevant, though certainly not as rousing, as 'Abd al-Salam Faraj's "Forgotten Duty" or Qutb's "Milestones."
Put briefly, the Islamic mainstream has come to accept theoretically crucial elements of political democracy: pluralism (within the framework of Islam), political participation, government accountability, the rule of law and the protection of human rights. But it has not adopted liberalism, if that includes religious indifference. Change is more noticeable in the domain of political organization than of social religious values. Kramer believes, “it cannot be emphasized strongly enough that what we’re observing is thought in progress, responding to a considerable extent to societal conditions and government policies.” It is to a large extent not abstract but political, even activist, mobilizing thought, shaped and influenced by a political environment that in virtually all cases is neither liberal nor genuinely pluralistic, let alone democratic.

Islam and Sovereignty

Once a basic picture of Islamic democracy is in place, it becomes easier to see why Islam and democracy need not be incompatible if both are conceived flexibly. Democracy literally means the rule of the people, while the meaning of Islam is submission to God, or more felicitously, recognition of God’s sovereignty. It would seem that either the people or God could be sovereign, but not both. The title of one of the dozens of recent Arabic books on the topic of Islam and democracy nicely captures this problem: *The Rule of God, the Rule of the People.*

The key to resolving the apparent incompatibility is to look more closely at what we mean by sovereignty. Intriguingly, even the U.S. Declaration of Independence does not expressly say that the people are sovereign but rather that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights. An unalienable right cannot
be eliminated even if the people vote to abrogate it. Unalienable rights therefore place a limit on the sovereignty of the people, even in a democracy. If some rights come from God, and the people cannot alienate or override those rights, then is not God sovereign and not the people? Yet, no one would say that the Declaration of Independence is undemocratic.

The bottom line is that even in a democracy the place of sovereignty is complicated. The people may rule with respect to some issues, but other issues are off the table, with rules coming from some other source, such as a theory of fundamental rights. Although the Constitution, which the people can amend, never mentions unalienable rights or God, the Bill of Rights does speak of certain preexisting rights that are retained by “the people” and must come from somewhere. Referring to the U.S. Constitution does not absolutely prove that the essence of democracy lies somewhere other than in the sovereignty of the people; perhaps the Constitution is undemocratic in some ways but it does show that some recognizably democratic schemes acknowledge that the people need not be sovereign in the sense of having the last word on every question. That alone opens up some space for us to see how democracy and Islam might be compatible.

The word Islam, for its part, does imply recognition of God’s sovereignty. But a Muslim might acknowledge that God is sovereign over everything and also believe, at the same time, that God has left it up to humans to govern themselves on every subject on which he has not provided a definite law or view. Suppose you are a Muslim, and you accept that God said, in the Qur’an, that “there is no coercion in religion,” (Qur’an 2:256.) so that religion must be chosen freely. If you believe that, then the people cannot pass a law coercing Christians to accept Islam; God has spoken, and God is sovereign.
The same might be true of the penalty for murder. As a Muslim, you might believe that capital punishment is only permissible for a murderer who has been tried and convicted based on the eyewitness testimony of two reliable men. God has set his limit on the penalty, through his message as interpreted by Islamic law, so the penalty is off the table if there is only one witness, even if we know the accused is guilty. This belief is no different in its structure than what some democrats think about basic rights.

Acknowledging God’s sovereignty does not require believing that God has left no room for people to rule themselves. A Muslim can believe that God allows humans to rule themselves however they want so long as they adhere to the basic rules on which he has spoken. If you believe this, and also accept that democracy does not require the absolute sovereignty of the people, then you have the makings of an Islamic democrat.

Of course as a Muslim, you might also think that God is sovereign only in the sphere of the personal, not the collective. If you have such a view, you may not feel a need for a distinctively Islamic democracy. It will be enough to be a democrat in public matters and a Muslim in private matters. But Muslims who accept God as sovereign and think that God’s sovereignty extends beyond the private sphere can be Islamic democrats in the way just described.

Another possible way for people who accept God’s sovereignty to think about democracy is to consider the people as a whole to be entrusted with the collective power and responsibility to interpret and apply God’s will on earth. Iranian writer Abdolkarim Soroush has expressed a view similar to this one in his recent book titled *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam*. This view does not emphasize a particular sphere in which God has left things up to the ruler. Instead, it says that humans need to make sense
of how God wants us to govern. It is up to the community of Muslims to perform that
task, and they can and must do so collectively.

The appeal of this view for someone who wants Islam and democratic theory to
cohere is that the community has tremendous discretion in interpreting Islam and
enacting laws that embody its spirit. Democratic decision-making can extend to every
area of life and law. One limitation of this theory is that it is apparently the Muslim
community alone that is entrusted with the task of interpreting and applying God’s word.
That is all well and good for Muslims, but it excludes non-Muslims. If self-rule consists
in figuring out what God wants within the framework of Islam, then non-Muslims will
not be full-fledged participants. The answer that minorities in any democracy are
excluded when they do not share the fundamental values of the majority may be
unsatisfying to someone who thinks that equality is a touchstone of democracy.

Opponents

Two extremely different groups, one from the West and one from the Muslim
World, have been arguing vehemently that Islam and Democracy are incompatible.
On one hand some western scholars and ideologues have tried to present Islam as an anti-
democratic and inherently authoritarian ethos that precludes democratization in the
Muslim World. By misrepresenting Islam in this way they are seeking to prove that Islam
as a set of values is inferior to Western liberalism and is indeed a barrier to the global
progress of civilization.

On the other hand some Islamic activists, using extremely broad, simple and
sometimes crude notions of secularism and sovereignty, reject democracy as the rule of
Man as opposed to Islam which is the rule of God. But for the purpose of reflection let me merely suggest that Islamists who reject democracy falsely assume that secularism and democracy are necessarily connected. Secularism is a liberal tradition, not a prerequisite for democracy. Religion does play a significant role in democratic politics. The contemporary US is a case in point.

In order to understand the situation better one has to recognize the difference between sovereignty in principle (de jure) and sovereignty in fact (de facto). Sovereignty in fact is always Man’s whether in a democracy or an Islamic State. Rejecting democracy because Man is sovereign is a big mistake. What we really need to worry about is how to limit the defacto sovereignty of Man. Democracy with its principles of limited government, public accountability, checks and balances, separation of powers and transparency in governance does succeed in limiting Man’s sovereignty. The Muslim world plagued by despots, dictators and self-regarding monarchs badly needs the limitation of man’s sovereignty.

Many Muslim think tanks and scholars are probing these ideas. They are not only exposing the politics behind the arguments made by those westerners who hold malice against Islam, but are also exposing the fallacies in the assumptions of those Muslims who misunderstand democracy and Islam.

Others object vociferously to the suggestion that it might be possible to have democracy, especially liberal democracy, without separation of church and state. They argue that to be just to everyone, democracy cannot impose one vision of the good life. Liberal democracy requires government to remain neutral about what values matter most, and to leave that decision up to the individual. If religion and the state do not remain
separate, the state will inevitably impose or at least encourage the version of the good life preferred by the official religion.

It is necessary for a democracy worthy of the name to respect the individual’s right to worship as he or she chooses, and to provide religious liberty for all its inhabitants. But outside the U.S. constitutional structure, individual religious liberty does not necessarily mean that the government will not embrace, endorse, support, or fund one religion in particular. The government can support one particular view of the good life. It can give money to synagogues or ashrams or mosques or all of the above. But so long as the government does not force anyone to adopt religious beliefs that he or she rejects, it has not violated the basic right to religious liberty. Separation of church and state may be very helpful in maintaining religious liberty, as in the United States, but it is not always necessary for it.

Whether we notice it or not, governments are already endorsing certain visions of the good life all the time. Our government gives medals to heroes who embody the values we admire. It proclaims holidays to celebrate things we care about. Public schools teach students what it means to be polite and honest and sincere, although such values differ from place to place and even family-to-family. We sponsor some art and not other art, and we use our limited resources to put some books in our public libraries but not others. We say that segregation is wrong because it causes some people to feel excluded. It would be naïve to claim that all of these government activities are morally neutral. They all reflect ideas about the right way to live. They all affect us as citizens, but none of these activities imposes any one set of values on us. We are still free to choose and live as we like. Another way to put it is to say that a democracy could try to separate law and
morals if it wanted to, although in practice it would be very difficult. But a democracy does not have to separate law and morality.

There are various reasons for thinking that democracy and Islam cannot coexist. According to one view, held by some Westerners and some Islamists, there is a fundamental opposition of values between Islam and democracy, or alternatively between Islam and the West. This sort of view is sometimes attributed, not altogether fairly, to Samuel Huntington, the scholar of democratic development and author of *The Clash of Civilizations*, who proposed a range of new conflicts to replace the Cold War. Although critics expressed deep skepticism about Huntington's suggestion of unavoidable opposition between Islam and the West after September 11, Huntington looked prophetic. The worst attack on American soil had come from an Islamic source. And the attack had not come from a state in the Muslim world but from non-state terrorists, apparently motivated by religious-political beliefs. That made it look like Islamic "civilization" was the source of the attack on America, rather than Muslim governments.

The historian Bernard Lewis, author and editor of important books like *The Arabs in History* (1993) and the *Cambridge History of Islam* (1978), and a member of the same Cold War generation as Huntington, is also seen as falling into the fundamental opposition camp. In his recent work, especially a book called *What Went Wrong?* (2002), Lewis has emphasized the failure of the Muslim world to make its way forward successfully into modernity. The book provides a scholarly tour of the later Ottoman Empire, then ends with speculation about how the Muslim world failed to embrace Western ideas as apparently unconnected as classical music and political and economic freedom. Lewis does not subscribe to the inherent incompatibility of Islam and the West,
or else he would not imply that the Muslim worlds still have the option of embracing Western values, but he does hint that at present the Muslim and Western worlds have gone so far down different tracks as to make them profoundly alien to one another.

Are Islam and Democracy deeply at odds, as Huntington and Lewis would both claim? Has the Muslim world “failed” in its encounter with modernity? Part of the reason that these questions are difficult is that some Islamists agree that the values of Islam and the values of the West are incompatible and that the Muslim world has fallen behind the West. Nor is this opinion new. Muslims scholars such as Amir Arslan talked about having “fallen behind” Europe by the late nineteenth century. In fact, an influential Arabic book by Arslan called *Why the Muslims Have Lagged Behind* and *Why Others Have Advanced* came out in the 1930’s and was translated into English in 1952. But the Islamists have a different answer to this question. They argue that the Muslim world has fallen behind because it has neglected the wellspring of its own true value system, namely Islam. Muslims have blindly mimicked the West instead of looking within Islam to find answers for the future.

Said: Orientalism

Beyond the oppositional views of some Islamists, another factor that makes it hard to approach the question of the relationship between Islam and the West is what Edward Said, in an influential academic books on this topic, has given the name *Orientalism*. Said argued that Westerners who have engaged with the Muslim world have tended to see the East as fundamentally different from the West; as a kind of blank slate on which to inscribe their own beliefs, ideas, and interpretations. According to this
view, much of what the West says about or sees in the Eastern ‘other’ is more a projection of Western fantasy than a reflection of how Muslims or people of the East see themselves. To make matters worse, the political relationship of West to East for most of the last 200 years has been one of Western domination, through a combination of colonization, indirect rule, gunboat diplomacy, and simple influence. If one connects Western ideas about the East to this political relationship it is possible to conclude that the West is often trying to make sense of the East in order to control it. The potent combination of fantasy and control typifies Orientalism at its most blatant according to Said.

Generalizing about Western attitudes toward Islam calls for a delicate touch. Western philologists, historians, novelists, painters, adventurers, diplomats, and politicians have engaged Islam and Muslims, each with different approaches, strategies, and ideals. But even if one remains agnostic about how fully Said’s category of Orientalism captures the range of Western thinking about the Muslim world, the concept cautions any writing about Islam to avoid reducing Muslims and their beliefs to one essential type. The range, variety, and diversity of the 1.2 billion Muslims in the world is breathtaking, and that extends to views, beliefs, culture, values, and family structures. Indeed, the whole of human experience. And of course not all Muslims are “Eastern.” There are Muslims all over Africa and in Europe and the Americas, in addition to East, South, and Southeast Asia, and the Near and Middle East. Muslims make up the majority of the population in as many as fifty countries, from the tiny to the very populous. What is true of Bahrain may not be true of Morocco or Senegal or Pakistan. It may not even be true of Saudi Arabia, even though Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are near neighbors. And
although reliable statistics are difficult to obtain, there seems to be no doubt that Islam is growing quickly, perhaps at a rate as high as 2.13 percent per year, compared with 1.4 percent for the world population generally. In a country like Algeria, half the population is under the age of 20. If today Muslims are somewhere between one in five and one in four of the world's population, by 2025 they may be closer to one in three. When speaking of such numbers and variety, it would be a serious mistake to oversimplify.

But it would also be unnecessarily cautious never to speak of "the Muslim world" at all. Muslim countries share family resemblances connected to the language and values that many Muslims associate with Islam. The meaning of Islam is contested, but it is recognizable in the values and beliefs that many Muslims share. Certain movements and ideas speak to Muslims in diverse circumstances because of the way they draw upon those common values and beliefs.

A further warning in Said's critique of Orientalism, is to avoid writing and thinking in a way that seeks to dominate or impose values upon the Muslim world. Much Western scholarship about Muslims has undeniably come in connection with various projects of colonial, imperial, or, nowadays, superpower influence. A book that addresses Western policy in the Muslim world today must avoid the same pitfalls.

In summary, Chapter Three examined the definition of the history of Islam and democracy in terms of their distinctions, variances, and complexities. It was argued that Islam and democracy are compatible to the extent that both ideas are flexible if defined broadly enough. This led to a discussion of imagined prospects for an Islamic democracy while taking into account the nuances, problems, and alternatives in the rationale for a
favorable synergy between the two ideas. Different rationales for opposing such a view are presented and evaluated.

We now turn to Chapter Four, which will attempt to discuss the dynamism of the Islamic tradition with its ongoing practical evolution in the 21st century. I will define key terms and then make an attempt to discuss the issues of Islamism as a movement with potential benefits to deliberative dialogue in the Muslim world. Islamism has become a primary vehicle and vocabulary of most political discourse throughout the Muslim world.
Endnotes


9 Ibid., 4.

10 Ibid.

11 Based on *Qur'an* 5:43-46


14 Ibid., 7.

15 Ibn Taymiyyah (1268-1328). Theologian, who has had much influence on the modern radical Islamist movement. He is known among the most conservative and radical religious leaders and his voice carries much weight.


17 Scholar of Early Muslim History


19 See, Beirut: *Center for Arab Unity Studies*.
An Islamic extremist group active since the late 1970s; seeks to overthrow the Egyptian government and replace it with an Islamic state; works in small underground cells; "the original Jihad was responsible for the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981".

Sayyid Qutb: Father of Modern Islamic Extremism. Wrote explanation of how a Muslim might justly assassinate a ruler. Qutb relied on the writings of Ibn Taymiya (1268-1328).


Feldman, After Jihad, 29.


Ibid.
CHAPTER FOUR

DYNAMICS OF ISLAM

A critical notion of this thesis is that Islam as a religion is not a monolith and those who follow the religion of Islam (i.e. Muslims) are found in a seemingly endless variety of personal, cultural, and social environments that foster difference within their particular interpretations of religious practice and belief. One of the mottos of this chapter will be a saying of the Prophet Muhammad, “Difference of opinion is a mercy for my community.” Thus, different interpretative frameworks can be likened to the spokes of a wheel that form the religion of Islam as a tradition in varying times and places. It is therefore impossible in the time span of this thesis, let alone this chapter, to look at all of these particular distinctions within the religion throughout history. Instead, I will make an attempt to examine issues of the contemporary movement known as Islamism taking into account its potential for an attempt to provide deliberative dialogue in the Muslim world and then taking into account its problems. I then briefly discuss Islam and its contextual understanding, religious interpretative practice, and politicizing aspects. This leads into the discussion of a case study of Iraq and its potential for democracy today. One of the main concerns of this chapter will be to show the interpretative fluidity and dynamism of the Islamic tradition with an emphasis on its ongoing practical evolution in the 21st century.
First I need to define terms. What is an Islamist? I define the term broadly—in keeping with the reality of the phenomenon: An Islamist is anyone who believes that the Qur'an and the Hadith contain important principles about Muslim governance and society, and who tries to implement these principles in some way. This definition embraces a broad spectrum that includes radical and moderate, violent and peaceful, traditional and modern, democratic and antidemocratic. At one extreme it includes Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda; on the other, the ruling moderate Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey, which seeks membership in the European Union and cooperates with Washington to some degree on key aspects of regional politics. The moderate side of the spectrum vastly outweighs the more dangerous, violent and radical segment, yet it is these latter radical forces that constitute the focus of most governments and the media.

The term “Islam” is often used to depict an ideology that has transformed the religion into a political tool or a social movement. Other times, the term “Islamic” is applied to a wide range of historical subjects that relate to the society in which the religion is practiced, but may not relate to the religion specifically, such as: “Islamic art,” “Islamic history,” and “Islamic politics.” These subjects are of course important and worthy of study and I will attempt to highlight them within this chapter at least to a minimal degree.

The term “Islamist challenge” refers to the pressure generated by movements of Islamic resurgence in the Arab world. These are movements that seek to change their societies by deriving their programs and ideologies from the basic texts of Islam. The term “Islamic fundamentalism” carries connotations from American Protestantism and
reduces a wide and complex range of groups and individuals to stereotypes (e.g. extremists, militants, terrorists) sharpened in past decades in the Western and Arab news media. “Islamist” (“Islamiyyun”) is what people belonging to Islamic movements call themselves, while “fundamentalist” is what their opponents derisively call them in a foreign tongue. “Fundamentalist,” with its judgmental tone and its implications of literalism, antimonodernism, and fanaticism, is a term for those who have already made up their minds about all Islamists and is therefore inappropriate for scholarly research.

“Islamist” is distinct from “Muslim” in that the former refers to people with a conscious activist agenda while the latter is a nominal identity for people of a gamut of ideological views. The majority of the Arab world is Muslim, while only those with ideologies that call for the implementation of Islam in the public as well as private realms are Islamists.

Islamism

Islamism is a political ideology. Inside the same society, different directions of Islamism can be found. It holds that Islam is not only a religion, but also a political system that governs the legal, economic and social imperatives of the state. The goal of Islamism is to re-shape the state. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, Islamism, along with other political movements inspired by Islam, gained increased attention in the Western media. The media often confuses the term Islamism with related terms such as Islam, fundamentalism, and militant Islam. Although the groups and individuals representing these are not mutually exclusive, within academia, each term does have a distinct definition. Some Islamist groups have been implicated in terrorism.
and have become targets in the War on Terrorism. Islamofascism is an associated pejorative term. This topic is also discussed in Islam as a political movement.

Various forms of Islamism will be the dominant intellectual current in the region for some time to come and the process is still in its infancy. In the end, it is hopeful that deliberation is more likely to take root through organically evolving liberal Islamist trends at the grassroots level than from imported Western modules of “instant democracy.”

History of Islamism

Islamist movements developed during the twentieth century in reaction to several forces. Following World War I and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and the subsequent dissolution of the Caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (founder of Turkey), some Muslims perceived their religion as in retreat, and felt that Western ideas were spreading throughout Muslim society, along with the influence of Western nations. During the 1960s, the predominant ideology within the Arab world was pan-Arabism which deemphasized religion and emphasized the creation of a socialist, secular state based on Arab nationalism rather than Islam.

Governments based on Arab nationalism have found themselves facing economic stagnation and disorder. Some Muslims place the blame for these flaws in Muslim societies on the influx of "foreign" ideas; a return to the principles of Islam is seen as the natural cure. A persistent Islamist theme is that Muslims are persecuted by the West and other foreigners. In this context, Islamist ideas developed in several different settings.
The word "Islamism" is highly appropriate, for this is an "-ism" like other "-isms" such as fascism and nationalism. Islamism turns the bits and pieces within Islam that deal with politics, economics, and military affairs into a sustained and systematic program. As the leader of the Muslim Brethren put it some years ago, "the Muslims are not socialist nor capitalist; they are Muslims." I find it very telling that he compares Muslims to socialists and capitalists and not to Christians or Jews. He is saying, we are not this "-ism," we are that "-ism." Islamism offers a way of approaching and controlling state power. It openly relies on state power for coercive purposes.

Some scholars see Islamism as yet another twentieth-century radical utopian scheme. Like Marxism-Leninism or fascism, it offers a way to control the state, run society, and remake the human being. It is by others seen as Islamic-flavored version of totalitarianism. The details, of course, are very different from the preceding versions, but the ultimate purpose is very similar. Islamism is also a total transformation of traditional Islam; it serves as a vehicle of modernization. The ideology deals with the problems of urban living, of working women and others at the cutting edge, and not the traditional concerns of farmers. As Olivier Roy, the French scholar puts it, "Rather than a reaction against the modernization of Muslim societies, Islamism is a product of it." Islamism is not a medieval program but one that responds to the stress and strains of the twentieth century.²

In this, Islamism is a huge change from traditional Islam. One illustration: Whereas traditional Islam's sacred law is a personal law, a law a Muslim must follow wherever he is, Islamism tries to apply a Western-style geographic law that depends on where one lives. Take the case of Sudan, where traditionally a Christian was perfectly
entitled to drink alcohol, for he is a Christian, and Islamic law applies only to Muslims. But the current regime has banned alcohol for every Sudanese. It assumes Islamic law is territorial because that is the way a Western society is run.

I also wish to note that Islamism has few connections to wealth or poverty; it is not a response to deprivation. There is no discernible connection between income and Islamism. Rather, this movement is led by capable people coping with the rough and tumble of modern life. The ideology appeals primarily to modern people; I am always fascinated to note how many Islamist leaders (for example in Turkey and Jordan) are engineers.

Islamism is now somewhat a powerful force. It runs to minimal extent governments in Sudan and Afghanistan. It is an important force of opposition in Algeria, Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority. (By my understanding of some scholars Saudi Arabia and Libya are not Islamist.) Islamism is a phenomenon primarily taking place in cities and the most prominent members are young members with higher education, often with a modest background and often with parents living in the countryside. Islamists often have a feeling that despite the efforts they have put down in their studies, they have not managed to climb very much socially, that the jobs they were aspiring for are given to people with good social connections, but less qualifications.

Islamists do not see themselves as revolutionaries, in the sense that a revolution will turn the society upside down and create new social structures from scratch. The revolution that Islamists hope for is the one that will bring old values back according to how they believe that society was in early Islam and wipe out all degenerated elements in the modern society. Islamists seek to bring people of the rural areas into the modern age,
at the same time as they fight for preserving many old values that they believe cities dwellers are losing.

In economical politics, most Islamists defend a system close to the social democracy practiced in many European countries. When Islamists diverge from social democracy it is more often in the direction of capitalism than in the direction of communism. The most specific Islamist view on economics, is the refusal of interest on loans and deposits. Instead banks should work as investment organizations, earning money from real profits.

The Islamist view on women vary a lot, but in many cases the structure of the Islamic organizations, along with the political programs, have made many women join the Islamists in order to liberate themselves. It is quite common that Islamists defend the woman’s right to work and to have political and social influence.

Islamists are not democrats, even if there have been very successful attempts of making the Islamists part of a democratic structure as in Jordan and for a very brief period in Turkey, but yet, Islamist programs are not in favor of dictatorship. Dictatorship can be transitory but the ideal structure in an Islamist society is the system of shura, where the leaders are in frequent contact with the entire society, and ask about their needs, and for their ideas, and are obliged to show respect for what they are told.

Movements versus Parties

Political participation by definition requires compromise. If a movement possesses clearly established political and religious values, is it appropriate to compromise those values by cooperation with other political movements whose values
might be quite alien? And if the rules of the game, as noted above, are skewed or unfair, is there any value in cooperating with an unjust political order for marginal gain? The virtue of a movement, as opposed to a party, is that it can espouse its moral and political values without working with the regime, without compromising its own principles. Many Islamists have argued further that it is nearly impossible to change the political order without first changing the ideas, values, and attitudes of society itself. If a transition in public values and understanding has not taken place, then even a popular Islamist party faces the issue of whether to try to impose its views on the public at some risk if the public is not ready. Indeed, one major Islamist thinker, Shaykh Ghannushi of Tunisia, living in exile in London, has famously commented “the most dangerous thing is for the Islamists to be loved by the people before they get to power and then hated afterwards.”^ Yet in the end, the temptations of competing in the political order as a political party have proven irresistible for most Islamists, even when the rules of the game are perceived as unfair. Power is perceived as the ultimate instrument of change. The state itself is the prize, however used to fulfill political goals.

As a result, most Islamist movements in the Arab world have opted to move in the direction of establishing political parties where permitted. The most important case in point is the Muslim Brotherhood, the oldest, most important, and most influential of all Islamist movements. The Brotherhood led the way with the establishment of political parties in most Arab countries, under a variety of different names. The Brotherhood in Jordan, for example, has cooperated for decades with the throne, at one point providing a valuable counterweight to the power of radical Arab nationalist parties in the 1960s. The Brotherhood is active in Egypt as well (the seat of the original movement and still its
unofficial headquarters). It has contested elections regularly in Algeria since the Algerian political order was partially opened in 1991 and where it was viewed by the regime as a moderate force compared with the largest and slightly more radical umbrella organization, the Islamic Salvation Front. Parties linked with the Brotherhood are also legally active in politics in Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Yemen. It remains as a movement in other Arab states where political parties are banned. It is permitted to exist as a movement in Egypt but is not allowed to form an official party although Brotherhood members are sometimes permitted to run on the slate of other parties and win seats in the very name and controlled parliament. The Brotherhood is banned outright in Syria and Tunisia, but it is allowed to function as a movement under very close supervision in Saudi Arabia. It has reemerged strongly in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein.

Islamist Parties: Diversification

State repression of Islamist movements and parties over past decades pushed them toward a certain sense of solidarity with one another and avoidance of mutual public criticism. But that reality is changing as movements expand and diversify, producing a far healthier phenomenon of more open debate and rivalry among them. Some Islamist parties have tried to put themselves beyond criticism by assuming conspicuously religious names linked to God or the Prophet, a practice denounced by secularists as arrogant and dangerous: How could a party with the name of Party of God (Hizballah) be beyond political criticism or attack? How can a specific political party speak in the name of God? Today, there are not only several Parties of God, but several Islamic Jihads, an
Army of Muhammad (Jaysh Muhammad), Troops of God (Jund Allah), Partisans of Islam (Ansar al-Islam), and others of similar ilk. By becoming commonplace, religiously freighted names such as these are actually frittering away their religious impact. And with the multiplication of Islamist parties, debate and rivalry among them has opened up, an extremely important and healthy phenomenon. No Islamist party can now claim any serious religious authority, even if they wield political, financial, or guerrilla power. Radical and intolerant movements cannot claim monopoly on religious truth and the public has opportunity to hear debate over religion as it affects politics.

Divisions, debate, and rivalry among Islamist parties now occur not only between countries, but within a single country as in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, and Yemen. Interestingly, in Egypt a more modernist offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood has emerged in the form of the Center Party (Hizb al-Wasat), which calls for far greater women’s representation within the party and for the extension of membership to the Coptic Christian minority using the values, not the theology, of the Islam as a common denominator. The old-line Brotherhood has opportunistically cooperated with the regime in preventing the Center Party from gaining legal status within the country. Nonetheless, further debate among all these parties is welcome and important. Islamist ideology must be exposed to full public debate if it is to evolve, mature, and deal with the real world responsibly, constructively, and pragmatically.

Another development that plays for the future on the opposing side is that as Islamist parties legally enter the political order, they could start playing politics. They have proven adept at forming coalitions with other parties, regardless of ideology, to achieve common short-term goals, usually conservative ones. In Kuwait, the Muslim
Brotherhood and the fundamentalists (Salafis) are rivals, but they often agree on conservative approaches to social issues such as separate male-female education and issues of public morality. In Jordan, because of the preponderance of Palestinians in the country, the Brotherhood has played heavily to the agenda of struggle for Palestinian rights in Israel. Although the Brotherhood as an organization does not engage in political violence, it draws a clear distinction, as does most of the Arab world, between the apocalyptic terrorism of the Al Qaeda type, which it condemns, and the armed struggle for Palestinian national liberation, which it condones.

Islamists also play politics through exploiting Islam in the debate of religious issues that do not lead in the direction of liberalization at all. In Egypt and Kuwait, for example, Islamists have often demanded the government ban specific books or arrest certain leading liberal thinkers for blasphemy. This role is hardly constructive and indeed has the undesirable effect of inhibiting the very debate that would lead to greater evolution and interpretation of Islam in a modern context. In most cases, the Islamists, like other politicians, are strictly playing politics seeking to embarrass and weaken the state by charging it with insufficient zeal in protecting Islam. Sometimes Islamists will call for the state to adopt far more conservative positions in conformity with ostensible “Islamic law” as a way of pressuring the state. These tactics are familiar in all democracies as some political leaders adopt extreme agendas designed to tactically embarrass the incumbent government and appease key segments of the public even when such agendas are unrealistic.

At the same time, however, politics also forced some degree of liberalization on Islamists. Women’s roles within Islamist parties have grown in all Muslim countries as
soon as elections are held because female votes are as valuable as male votes in winning
elections. Women’s wings of Islamist parties, and even women on the central committees
of these parties, are now commonplace.

Therefore, we can see within Islamist politics some key developments that evoke
cautious optimism about its future evolution in the Arab world:

1) Broad understanding of the importance of democratization and the benefits that accrue
for Islamist parties themselves in calling for more participatory government.

2) Willingness of many parties to work pragmatically with other parties with differing
ideologies toward common goals without becoming rigidly committed to a narrow vision.

3) Exposure of Islamist parties to the political and social realities of the contemporary
Arab world in which mere slogans about “Islam is the answer” simply will not suffice;
their growing awareness that they need to find concrete answers to concrete problems if
they are to succeed in the political arena.

4) Broadening of the ideological debate among Islamists themselves, thus opening space
for greater intellectual and theoretical development and evolution.

5) Signs of growing pragmatism and realism based on experience.

6) The nonviolent nature of the vast majority of such parties.

7) The likelihood that most of the grand debates of Arab politics in the next decade will
be within the framework of Islamist politics more broadly. In other words, Islamist
debate is just beginning. Political debate must encompass Islam if the debate is to be
meaningful. Exclusion of the Islamic factor in Arab politics will simply be one-sided and
unrealistic in its exclusion of the single greatest force within politics.5
My examination to this point is to show how the Islamist movement is a complex and diffuse social and political movement, consciously developing a substantive critique of the existing power structure. The “Islamic movement,” broadly speaking, includes all individuals and groups seeking to change their societies by deriving their ideology from Islam. While these groups and individuals differ in methods, approaches, styles, and substantive issues, they agree on the positive worth of Islam and the relevance of its basic concepts and values to the contemporary world. They want to shift the frame of reference in the public realm to one in which Islam, in its various interpretations, is a major shaping force.

Islam: Contextual Understanding, Interpretative Practice, & Politicizing Religion

In presenting a contextual understanding of Islam, it is necessary to continually take up particular examples and ask how symbols and concepts from the Islamic tradition are reinterpreted and reapplied in new situations. An important case is the concept of jihad, often mistranslated as “holy war.” It would be more appropriate to explain this word as meaning “struggle for truth.” Over the centuries this ethical ideal has been held up as the quest for virtue in a variety of forms. It has a secondary meaning of military struggle against evil opponents, and it was inevitably appropriated in a self-serving fashion by many royal dynasties seeking justification for their conquests. Thus, for example, the Persian Shah and the Ottoman sultan did not hesitate to declare that each was waging a righteous “struggle for truth” against the other, when in practice one kingdom was simply battling another as usual. The subject of jihad will be explored in

106
greater depth below but the point is that religious symbols have no specific meaning in themselves apart from the people who deliberately employ them in specific ways.

To put the matter of historical context more bluntly, in every issue that has to do with Islam, the most important question revolves around who is authorized to interpret Islam. There is, after all, no Muslim pope. Should everyone accept the authority of the religious leaders in Saudi Arabia? Some Muslims reject those scholars because they consider the puritanical Wahhabi doctrine to be extremist and even the Saudi government has announced that edicts regarding Islamic law are only acceptable from officially recognized scholars. Therefore, anyone who wants to avoid being gullible needs to exercise some critical judgment regarding any comprehensive statement about Islam, particularly when it is presented as “the Islamic view on …”

In approaching Islamic texts and religious concepts, one must stand aside from the attitude of missionary competition that underlies the modern concept of religion. That is, it is all too easy to fall into the trap of using isolated quotations of scripture or law as “proof texts” to determine the acceptability or unacceptability of an entire religion. Thus, one could take a passage from the New Testament, like St. Paul’s insistence in 1 Corinthians that women should cover their hair and keep silent in church; reading this, readers with feminist inclinations might conclude that any religion containing such a rule is unacceptable. Such a single-issue approach based on current orthodoxies tends to limit, at the very least, one’s ability to understand the meaning and significance of this verse in its own time and place. Contemporary Christians might reply that it was a custom for respectable married women to wear head coverings at that time. They might also argue that there are other verses about the equality of sexes that are statements of principle and
therefore more important to engage in a certain amount of patient questioning when
confronted with things that seem strange to contemporary sensibilities.

In the same way, those who are intent on finding proof texts to demonstrate the
necessarily evil intentions of Muslims should be aware that they themselves are using the
methods and arguments of fundamentalism. For instance, one can find texts from the
*Qur’an* proclaiming war against the pagan Arabs of Mecca, who were engaged in a bitter
struggle against Muhammad, and these have been used as evidence that Muslims are
perennially engaged in warfare against all non-Muslims. Yet, few would hold that the
more bloodthirsty passages of the Hebrew Bible require all Christians to emulate verses
like the following: “If I whet my glittering sword, and my hand takes hold on judgment, I
will take vengeance on my adversaries, and will requite those who hate me. I will make
my arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh with the blood of the slain
and the captives, from the long-haired heads of the enemy.”° One can also find places in
the New Testament where Jesus uses startling language: “Do not think that I have come
to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”° While there may
be fundamentalists who insist on the unlimited applicability of every verse of this type,
most Christians would assert that such sayings reflect particular historical situations and
are limited to those contexts. They would argue that there are overriding moral themes
and principles in the Bible that take precedence over individual verses, or that
metaphorical or allegorical language is being used in certain cases. It would seem only
reasonable that, instead of leaping to the most alarming conclusions, we allow Muslims
the opportunity to interpret their own scripture. Yet few outsiders have bothered to
discover the history of Qur’anic interpretation among Muslims, especially since only fundamentalist versions of Islam have come to the attention of the mass media.

All this is to indicate that no religious concept, symbol, or practice is self-evident; in every case, one needs to ask about the situation in which a particular aspect of Islam is being invoked. Likewise, in the proliferation of online texts that characterizes the contemporary information age, it is especially important to read critically the controversial material that appears on Internet sites attacking and condemning opposed points of view. In light of the long history of negative portrayals and distortions of Islam by hostile outside critics, it is particularly necessary to question contemporary material that plays into this extraordinarily strong anti-Islamic bias. Just as in the case of racial prejudice against blacks or anti-Semitism against Jews, the gross negative stereotyping of centuries of religious thought and hundreds of millions of people should be treated as a contemptible form of bigotry.

In an attempt to understand the Islamic faith, there is a problem in an approach to present a summary and overview of basic religious practices and beliefs. The problem is that this approach outlines these catechisms and religious requirements in the abstract without much reference either to multiple schools of thought or the history of Islamic religious practice in different regions. In this respect, it can be difficult to distinguish between a textbook summary of basic practices and the preaching of religious instruction that one might encounter in a mosque. This is even true with what are called the five pillars of Islam as discussed briefly in Chapter One. My point is that there is a descriptive interpretation of the range of Islamic history and practice.
Though it is certainly true that there are commonalities of faith and practice that are shared widely by many Muslims, a historical and nonsectarian approach has to take account of differences as well. It is equally true that certain Muslim religious authorities lean heavily on the concept of Islamic unity. While the unity of the ideal religious community is certainly an important symbol, it is not a fact, nor has it ever been. Indeed, there are conflicting notions of Islamic belief and practice.

There will always be a gap between the prescriptive, normative, ideal concept of religion and the descriptive, historical, and sociological accounts of religion. In contrast to the authoritative declarations of theologians and the apparatus of the nation-state, scholars, and other outsiders have to be content with a much broader notion of what can be considered Islamic. In this sense, we could describe as Islamic a number of competing theologies that are based on the Qur'an. We could include various ethical systems including basic rituals that appeal to Muhammad as a model of behavior. Among other Islamic institutions would be the many important lineages of charismatic spiritual transmission, whether Sufi or Shi'i, and a variety of local practices such as pilgrimages to shrines. Rituals of the life cycle, such as birth, marriage, and death, would also fall into the category of Islamic. The extended range of culture associated with Islamic religion, covering such aspects of life as music, poetry, art, architecture, and government can be regarded in a related sense, what is termed by Graham Fuller as "Islamicate."

There is also the identification of the Islamic religion with particular political regimes or empires. While this identification has doubtless been encouraged by rulers who claims religious legitimacy, there are serious problems in merging religion with particular governments. For one thing, when Saddam Hussein or Yasser Arafat calls upon
the authority of Islam to buttress his political positions, it should be recalled that he has fewer religious credentials than American politicians such as Richard Nixon. On a more profound level, if history has taught us anything, it is that the rise and fall of empires has no moral meaning in itself, nor does superior military technology confer civilizational advancement. Although there is an understandable human desire for winners to interpret victory as divine favor, there are few who would candidly agree that military conquest is equivalent to moral supremacy.

Beyond this moral issue, there are further conceptual issues with politicizing religion. If Islam in incarnated in governments rather than in people, does “Islam” mean only countries with Muslim majorities or Muslim majority countries plus countries with significant Muslim minorities? If one considers only Muslim majority countries that call Islam the state religion, one excludes countries with explicitly secular constitutions. On closer examination, even countries that call themselves Islamic republics have composite structures. Their hybrid legal systems replace theoretical Islamic Law with appeals to Islamic authority, recast in the legal codes of nation-states that also draw on colonial law, local custom, and administrative decree.

What will the new images look like? The growing presence of educated Muslim minorities in America and Europe will be some of the decisive ingredients that will finally make possible a true dialogue that can create new images for a single world in which both Muslims and non-Muslims exist. Some of this dialogue will doubtless take place through debates that attempt to locate the sources of Islamic tradition in relation to contemporary issues. Yet the effort to create new images for a single world has been under way for many years. Perhaps the chief resource, still largely unrecognized, is the
creative activity of Muslims, particularly in the form of the novel, a distinctively European literary form that has been widely practiced in Muslim majority countries for more than a century. Muslims have certainly been using other artistic media such as music (hip-hop and other genres) to reflect on contemporary issues. But the novel, with its psychological reflection and sociological commentary, is perhaps the best source for realistic depiction of the lives of Muslims. In these writings, in contrast with ideological presentations, Islam turns out to be one thread interwoven with the rest of life, as in a tapestry, but there are many other issues that undergo examination; secular issues, politics, class, gender relations, colonialism, and local history make up the substance of most of these narratives. It is to these creative forms that we should look for the elaboration of the new images of Islam that will frame our future.

Are Islamists willing to accept a democratic order and work within it? Debate has swirled around these two grand questions for decades and has produced a broad variety of responses, often quite polarized. Whatever we may think about Islamists, the topic matters vitally because in the Middle East today they have few serious ideological rivals in leading opposition movements against a failing status quo. These Islamist movements are characterized by rapid growth, evolution, change, and diversification.

Although no Arab country has become a full-fledged democracy, some countries have moved closer to democracy than others. This is why some scholars speak of democratization as a transitional process toward fulfillment of some criteria for democracy. Some scholars distinguish between liberalization and democratization. Liberalization refers to a change which limits the power of the state to intervene in the life of people and allows one freer expression and oppositional activities.
Democratization refers more specifically to the process of change toward free elections, popular participation, and freedom of the masses; it is a change toward democratic rule. Huntington, among others, depicts democratization as a prolonged and complex process bringing an end to the nondemocratic regime, establishing the democratic regime, and finally, consolidating the democratic system. While democratization is more far-reaching than liberalization, the transition toward democracy could begin and usually begins when nondemocratic regimes loosen, liberalize their tight control over the populace, which may or may not lead to democratization.

The Evolution of Islamic Thought

Despite the historical obstacles to quick evolution of democracy in the Arab world, the region has seen considerable political evolution over the past few decades, most notably in the emergence and evolution of Islamism. Islamists have particularly shifted in their view of democracy over the past half century. For a long time, democracy was discredited on several grounds. First, it was perceived as a Western, indeed colonial, importation that had no roots in the Arab world. It was propounded mainly by a small group of Westernizers, a tiny elite who lacked broad acceptability in society and were seen to be linked to colonial and Western values in ways that threatened Muslim culture. It was an “alien” importation suspected of furthering the designs of imperial powers.

But political thought in Islam has long been aware of the requirement for good governance, particularly defined over the centuries as the need for just governance. Since few rulers anywhere in the world until recent centuries derived their legitimacy from an electoral process, in Islam rulers derived legitimacy, at least in the eyes of the clerics
(‘ulama), primarily through the rulers’ attentiveness to application of Islamic law and implementation of justice on the social level. But if rulers turned out not to be just or Islamically legitimate, there were no legal mechanisms for getting rid of them.

The problem was compounded when jurisprudential authority during the chaos and destruction of the Mongol invasions propounded the concept that even unjust rule was preferable to chaos and anarchy. This legal opinion has comfortably served autocrats well ever since, because it provides virtual de facto sanction for tyranny. These theories have not prevented Muslims, just like people in other parts of the world, from engaging in periodic revolts against oppressive rulers. Interestingly, mainstream Islamists in the twentieth century were the first to widely break with the clerical concept that “oppression is preferable to anarchy” and to demand that rulers must indeed be just and good Muslims, free of corruption or misrule. In this new view, if rulers failed to deliver justice, they could and should be legitimately overthrown - a near Jeffersonian vision that the tyrannical state should be resisted, even by force. As a result, Islamists have developed new regard for some aspects of Western democratic practice that include checks and balances and instrumentalities for getting rid of unwanted and illegitimate rulers.

How far does the Islamists’ embrace of democratic principles go? For several decades Islamists across the Muslim world have been steadily moving toward acceptance of the concept of democracy, at least in principle. The rationale has little to do with convoluted arguments about the source of sovereignty, or whether democracy is an alien Western institution. Islamist appreciation for the values of a democratic order has been most strengthened by the very reality that they themselves would be among the primary beneficiaries of it. The same goes for their growing support for concepts of human rights:
Even non-violent Islamists are now the primary victims of arbitrary authoritarian rule and extralegal punishment by the state (arrests, persecution, and execution). And as Islamists have assumed the role of the major opposition movement in most Arab states, the greater becomes the attraction of democracy that would likely grant them a dominant voice in initial elections.

Would Islamists still embrace democratization and human rights if they did not see themselves as the primary beneficiaries? This is a valid question, since much of this more recent Islamist appreciation for democracy is based primarily on pragmatic reasons. But why should not pragmatic thinking be desirable? Pragmatism, for example, has led to clear long-term political change in the thinking of the Muslim Brotherhood across most of the Arab world. Yet even here the conversion is not complete: There is the disturbing case of Sudan, where in 1989 the Brotherhood participated in a military coup against a semi-democratic regime because it believed it could not win power by democratic means. The Brotherhood is still the key element of an authoritarian order in Sudan today.

Caution is thus in order in evaluating the newfound Islamist enthusiasm for democracy. First, Islamists in power in the Muslim world in Sudan and the Taliban’s Afghanistan so far have not shown serious commitment to democracy. Even Sudan is groping its way toward greater opening with some of the former opposition parties, even while terrible human rights abuses that have been endemic to the country for decades continue in other areas. In these cases, Islamists behave in patterns typical of most regimes across the Muslim world: They are reluctant to give up power once they have attained it.
A more important reality, however, is that in these two cases, Islamists came to power via non-democratic processes, revolution and civil war, respectively. Any party that gains power by these means is unlikely to open up the system to greater democracy. The real test of Islamist commitment to democracy comes when they win power through democratic elections and then face the prospect of loss in future elections. In the Arab world there is no democratic precedent as yet. The old fear about Islamists supporting only “one man, one vote, one time” style elections has never actually happened in the Islamist experience because Islamists have not really been permitted to participate fully or win in open elections. The real question about whether Islamists are ready to win and lose elections have less to do with Islam and more to do with the political culture of the given country in question. Where democratic concepts and practice have some historical roots or track record, the chances are good that Islamists, indeed any political party, will honor constitutional precepts and accept defeat as well as victory. However, in states such as Algeria that have no tradition of democratic practice, there is no guarantee that if Islamists or any other political party win a legitimate electoral victory that they would hold subsequent elections or agree to leave power upon losing such an election.

The International Factor

If the Arab world were operating in isolation, it might be possible to forge the politics of a new Middle East sooner than later. A review of these trends would provide ample grounds for optimism about the successful integration of a great segment of the powerful forces of Islamist politics into a democratization process across the Arab world. But the Arab world is not operating in isolation. Indeed, it is now operating within an
intensely negative international environment with tensions perhaps unprecedented in the modern history of the Middle East. The Al Qaeda attacks of 9/11 transformed U.S. policy under the Bush administration, placing the war on terrorism at the centerpiece of U.S. foreign policy. This goal of eliminating terrorism worldwide has focused almost exclusively on the Muslim world where the majority of radical terrorist movements now exist. The war against the Taliban, the invasion of Iraq, the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, the U.S. occupation of Iraq, the spread of U.S. military presence across the Muslim world, the new embrace of authoritarian Muslim regimes as allies in the war on terrorism and the ongoing deterioration of the situation in Palestine are all international pressures. This sentiment is reflected and deepened by independent satellite television channels and is now beginning to affect the views of an entire generation of young Arabs.

At the same time, Arab regimes are under greater pressure from the United States on the one hand and their own people on the other more than ever before, at a time when the gap between the rulers and ruled can be seen as wide. Nearly all regimes are viewed with contempt by publics that see them as led by supine dictators, who depend on harsh security services to stay in power, who are powerless to change realities in the Arab world, who cling to tight relations with Washington at any cost to preserve their power and thus are even more subservient to U.S. interests than more democratic allies of the United States such as Turkey or various Western European countries. There is almost no regime in the region whose fall would not elicit widespread public enthusiasm, with possible exceptions in the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and maybe Morocco. This places Islamists at the forefront of the opposition and in command of much popular support. The
public may also show some cynicism on occasion about the opportunism of Islamists as well, but Islamists are the current masters of anti-imperial and anti-regime rhetoric.

Muslims, furthermore, feel uniquely under siege from the West albeit the United States at this stage in their history and react strictly defensively. They are in a hunker-down mode, feeling their culture and religion under attack and under legal discrimination even in the West. Any culture feeling itself under siege turns to basics. As a result, Muslims are embracing Islamic practice more deeply, an essential element of their identity. When their religion is vilified or portrayed in the West as part of the problem, Muslims not surprisingly react by intensifying their identification with Islam as a source of strength, solace, and solidarity. Islamic emotions are stronger than ever. Those Arabs who identify with other ideological trends, Arab nationalism, or the smaller leftist/socialist/Marxist elite, or the quite small liberal Westernizing elite, all find it difficult to avoid being drawn into a broader wave of Islamist nationalist rhetoric and action dedicated to repelling the foreign invader, militarily, politically, and culturally. The line between nationalism and the Islamic identity is now nearly obliterated: Even non-Muslim Arabs generally identify with the broader Islamist nationalist trend.

This chapter up to this point has attempted to show that democracy and political Islam in the context of Islamism, are potentially quite compatible in principle. I am optimistic about the long-term strength of this trend. Yet real world events damage the practice of such compatibility; the present anger and increasing radicalization of a Muslim world that feels itself under siege is creating a highly negative environment that is not conducive to the emergence of Islamist moderates, indeed for moderates of any stripe. Ultimately, this relationship between democracy and political Islam will not work
itself out in the abstract but in the real world. Its actual character on the ground will depend on some concrete variables: country, time, given personalities, local political cultures, and ambient regional and global politics.

Case Study: Potential for Democracy in Iraq Today

Whether or not the people of Iraq have assimilated enough liberalism to allow for the external implementation of democracy is certainly not clear-cut. The best anyone can say is that it is possible. Kevin Whitelaw reports that many Iraqi tribal chiefs are talking of American "liberation" rather than "occupation," and they are enthusiastic about their democratic future, as long as it emanates from Iraqi traditions and not American ones. What these tribal leaders are being taught by Americans is that democracy requires compromise. ⁸

However, there will probably not be many members of the tribes, clans, or ethnic groups voting for anyone other than one of their own for the foreseeable future. According to Jeffrey Record and Andrew Terrill, "Democracy means different things to different communities in Iraq.... It is not clear that the Shiite leadership understands or accepts the concept of minority rights, rule of law, and other democratic principles unrelated to majority rule." ⁹

Trust between national factions is another key factor in establishing a functional democracy. Each of the parties has to persuade the other that the rules of the democratic game will be obeyed. Regime members need to convince the opposition that they can keep the hardliners in the army and security services under control, and the opposition must show it can restrain the radicals in its ranks. Such trust building is a time-
consuming, uncertain process. In the Middle East and Iraq in particular, this process never really got started. Military regimes such as Saddam Hussein's in Iraq, won independence from Britain, and generally claimed their continued monopoly of power was necessary to preserve internal and external security. As well, trust between rulers and the people was not established because these authoritarian regimes in oil-rich countries did not depend on their citizenry for resources. In democracies, there is no taxation without representation; in these states, there was no taxation and therefore no representation. Finally, trust among the various factions of Islam is difficult because of the belief that each has the authority of Allah, which is uncompromising.

There are many other factors currently in play against the successful implementation of democracy in Iraq or the region, even if there is some degree of liberalism among the moderate Muslim population. Greg Miller wrote an article for the *Los Angeles Times* about a classified State Department report on this subject. The State Department report is highly skeptical regarding the outlook for the Bush administration's efforts. It cites high levels of corruption and crime, serious infrastructure degradation, overpopulation, and other forces that have caused widespread disenfranchisement of the people in the region. The report does not address the growing hostility of the majority of Iraqis towards the foreign military forces (to include American and British armed forces) they perceive as occupying their country. The report, entitled, "Iraq, the Middle East, and Change: No Dominoes," concludes that the democracy domino theory is not credible in the Middle East.

Before democracy can be implemented in any fashion, there must first be stability and security in Iraq. Record and Terrill note that: "In Iraq, political success will require
creation of: 1) a government regarded as legitimate by the great majority of the country’s inhabitants, and 2) security forces capable of protecting the new political order." Not only does Iraq need its own military force to protect its borders, it needs a competent police force and the infrastructure to make it effective, to include uncorrupted judges, courts, and prisons. The challenges to be faced by the new Iraqi government are staggering. It must reconstruct a devastated economy, establish the rule of law after decades of tyranny, and satisfy Iraq’s myriad of communal problems all while fighting an insurgency and securing Iraq’s borders in a dangerous neighborhood.

Ahmed Hashim spent several months in Iraq, returning in April 2004. He found that: "Iraq is overridden with partisan warfare by former regime loyalists, organized rebellions by disgruntled Iraqis, terrorism by foreign and domestic Islamist extremists, and a wave of crime by organized gangs.” While there, the number of insurgent attacks continually increased, and is still increasing today. He notes that the movement is not united by a single leader or ideological vision. Instead, all factions are united in fighting against the American occupation of Iraq. Once the common enemy is removed, then the in-fighting among the factions will begin, and the civil war will likely ensue. Finally, Hashim declares that: “The insurgency can evolve...into patterns of complex warfare and violence. Should this evolution continue, the prospects for American success in bringing about Iraqi security, political stability, and reconstruction will be nonexistent.”

The primary issue for the United States becomes one of patience and perseverance. Record and Terrill conclude that: “Many experts believe that genuine democracy lies beyond the power and patience of the United States to create in Iraq.” Amy Chua notes that: “at no point in history did any Western nation ever implement capitalism and
overnight universal suffrage at the same time, the precise formula of free market
democracy currently being pressed on developing countries around the world.”¹⁴ She
finds that forcing a laissez-faire market and rapid democratization, such as the U.S. is
doing in Iraq, will more than likely aggravate ethnic instability and result in violence.
“The global spread of free market democracy has thus been a principal aggravating cause
of ethnic instability and violence throughout the non-Western world.”¹⁵

Many Middle East scholars also do not believe liberalism and democracy can be
successfully implemented from external sources, such as by the United States. Graham
Fuller concludes that: “In the end, modern liberal governance is more likely to take root
through organically evolving liberal Islamist trends at the grassroots level than from
imported Western modules of ‘instant democracy.”¹⁶ Record and Terrill observe that:

Under even the best of circumstances, fashioning genuine democracy in
post-Saddam Hussein Iraq is problematic. Since its creation, Iraq has
known nothing but authoritarian rule and, under Saddam Hussein, a
vicious neo-Stalinist tyranny. Though Iraqi regimes, like other
dictatorships, embraced such democratic trappings as elections,
parliaments, independent courts, they did so fraudulently for purely
propaganda purposes.¹⁷

The common belief is that after the U.S. assumed control of Iraq during Operation
Iraqi Freedom (OIF), we lost credibility with the population by not providing internal
security, except around the gas and oil facilities.

A Recommendation

The U.S. National Intelligence Council was reported to have concluded that in the
best case, Iraq could achieve a “tenuous stability” over the next 18 months. However,
most analysts believe that more than likely it will probably dissolve into a civil war,
especially if the United States withdraws its military forces in the near future. Thus,
many scholars recommend that under no circumstances should the United States abandon Iraq as it did South Vietnam in 1975. Indeed, abandonment would seem a near-guarantee of civil war.

What Cohen, Record, Terrill and others are alluding to is what Fareed Zakaria wrote about in *Foreign Affairs* in 1997, an "illiberal democracy." Zakaria observes that democratically elected regimes around the world are routinely ignoring limits on their power and depriving their citizens of basic freedoms. Where liberalism (the rule of law and basic human rights) and democracy (free and fair elections) have gone hand-in-hand in the West during the 20th century, they seem to be drifting apart in the rest of the world.

He claims that:

Democracy without constitutional liberalism is producing centralized regimes, the erosion of liberty, ethnic competition, conflict, and war.... From Peru to the Palestinian Authority, from Sierra Leone to Slovakia, from Pakistan to the Philippines, we see the rise of a disturbing phenomenon in international life – illiberal democracy.  

Zakaria also declares that: "half of the 'democratizing' countries in the world today are illiberal democracies." Leaders in these illiberal democracies argue that they need the authority to bring order to chaotic societies. However, unchecked centralization of power within a government has been the enemy of liberal democracy. Illiberal democracies gain a measure of legitimacy from the fact that they are reasonably democratic.

Zakaria strongly warns against allowing an ethnic group to take power over other competing ethnic groups. "Once an ethnic group is in power, it tends to exclude other ethnic groups. Compromise seems impossible.... Political competition that is so divisive can rapidly degenerate into violence." In Iraq, there are two distinct ethnic groups, Arabs and Kurds; as well as two distinct factions of Islam, Sunnis and Shiites. Certainly,
the concern is that if the Shiites, the largest of the groups, assumed power, they would be reluctant to relinquish it unless by force.

My recommendation is that the United States should not follow Zakaria’s guidance, but instead support illiberal democracy in Iraq if it evolves in this manner, with a long-term goal of moving Iraq towards becoming a liberal democracy. On another note but related, I recommend deliberative dialogue at the outset which could find a morally justifiable way of making binding collective decisions in the face of continuing moral conflict. Therefore, the U.S. should support whomever the Iraqi people elect as president, even if the elected president begins implementing non-liberal, non-democratic policies if in fact the process of deliberative dialogue was utilized.

This approach allows for liberal democracy in Iraq to evolve over time as recommended by many scholars from Graham Fuller to Amy Chua. Certainly, Iraq’s oil and natural gas wealth, as well as its highly educated population and middle class, could serve as the foundation for liberalism to evolve in Iraq. Perhaps a derivation of Zakaria’s hypothesis is more relevant today. Maybe an illiberal democracy could be a precondition for a liberal democracy, as Record and Terrill implied. Given that Iraq experienced or possesses many of the prerequisite factors for democracy to flourish, to include a history of democratic liberalism under British colonial rule, a highly educated population, significant national wealth, and a stable middle class, I would recommend this approach at this stage for Iraq.

Such a transition from an illiberal to a liberal democracy is not unprecedented in history. In every part of the planet, governments have successfully transitioned from a democratic dictatorship to a liberal democracy. In Southeast Asia, for example, both
Indonesia and the Philippines have made the transition. In Africa, South Africa has made the transition. And, in Latin America, Mexico and Brazil have made the transition. Given time, perhaps Iraq could make the transition as well in the Middle East.

However, as Iraq transitions from a totalitarian dictatorship to an illiberal (and eventually a liberal) democracy, it is important to keep in mind the political risks involved. Whenever a nation goes through a political transformation, it takes on the risk of state failure and political instability. I believe along with many scholars that it does appear that it is at the transition point to a democratic form of government that a state’s risk of failure and instability is greatest. Many advocate a policy and long-term strategy of “adaptive democracy” for Iraq, along the lines of Jordan, where there are elements of both Islam and liberal democracy being implemented simultaneously to various degrees. As adaptive democracy begins to take root in various places, we may find that in the ‘Muslim world, one size simply does not fit all.

Perfect is the enemy of the good. At this point, given the continued insurgency and general unrest within Iraq, most political pundits do not think it is possible to establish a legitimate national government. Therefore, I think the U.S. policymakers should aim a little lower regarding their goal for a democratic Iraq, and accept a less-than-perfect democratic government initially. Iraq needs the strong leader that an illiberal government features to overcome the numerous national insurgencies, while fostering stability and security within the country. This is the same approach the United States is taking with many of its close allies. Hence, this approach would not be unprecedented or unreasonable.
Where there are already numerous illiberal democracies in the Muslim and Arab worlds, from Morocco to Egypt, and from Lebanon to Qatar, there are a few successful liberal democracies as well, such as Turkey and Indonesia. Therefore, the United States could pursue the idea that an illiberal democratic government in Iraq is still better than the brutal dictatorship that Saddam Hussein had implemented. Furthermore, such a government in Iraq could evolve into a liberal or “adaptive” democracy over time with the appropriate political and economic motivations.

An illiberal democracy is not what the Bush administration had envisioned when they advocated a regime change in Iraq as it certainly is not likely to promote the spread of liberal democracy throughout the rest of the Middle East. However, it is the best we can hope for at this point, and much better than the alternative of a protracted civil war.

To recap, Chapter Four was an attempt to discuss the dynamism of the Islamic tradition with its ongoing practical evolution in the 21st century. I defined key terms and then made an attempt to discuss Islamism, its opportunity to be a hopeful mobilizing force for deliberative dialogue. In this respect, Islamism could be a mobilizing channel that in a hopeful sense could define and serve as the mission behind U.S. foreign policy as in the case of Iraq. The focus of deliberation is the notion that there are means to find a morally justifiable way of making binding collective decisions in the face of continuing moral conflict. This is a fundamental issue within the conflict between Islam and democracy, and with the theory of deliberation and its emphasis on dialogue in a practical sense; a mutual respect among Muslims could be valued. In Chapter Five, I will state my conclusions and provide recommendations on how to achieve the goal set forth in the conclusions, along with a rationale for those recommendations.
Endnotes


5 Ibid.

6 Deut. 32: 41-2.

7 Matt 10:34


11 Record and Terill, 20.

12 Ahmed S. Hasim, “Iraq’s Chaos,” at www.bostonreview.net/BR 29.5/hashim

13 Record and Terill, 55.


15 Ibid.


17 Record and Terill, 41.


19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this thesis it has been my attempt to show that deliberative dialogue is an alternative method for a potential peaceful Middle East. It is not the sole answer or "prophetic key" to the understanding of the Muslim world. Moreover, deliberative dialogue may not be envisioned by some as advocating regime changes especially at the outset of a nation in transition. It is certainly not likely to spread liberal democracy throughout the entire Middle East anytime soon. However, it is a hope and at this point it is only an attempt for the beginning of a possible end to the clash of Islam and democracy.

Chapter Two explains how the development of democratic theories lead to my examination that deliberative democracy is an alternative method with its emphasis on deliberation for assuring a peaceful Middle East. There are certainly alternative prescriptions and conditions of democracy. The controversial opponents of the theory of deliberative democracy are considered and it is noted that not even they disagree that mutual understanding and respect are key to the future of Islam and democracy. Indeed, these qualities are the essential conditions of deliberation.

Chapter Three was an attempt to define the long history of Islam and democracy, their distinctions, variances, and complexities. This attempt provided the discussion for imagining the prospects for an Islamic democracy while taking into account the nuances,
problems, and alternatives in the rationale for a favorable synergy between Islam and democracy. It is noted that the intellectual, religious, political, and cultural currents cannot be pinpointed to one sole common denominator.

Chapter Four was an attempt to discuss the dynamism of the Islamic tradition with its ongoing practical evolution in the 21st century. I defined key terms and then made an attempt to discuss the issues of Islamism as a movement with potential benefits to deliberative dialogue in the Muslim world. Islamism has become a primary vehicle and vocabulary of most political discourse throughout the Muslim world. In this respect, Islamism and potential deliberation within its movement could be a mobilizing channel that in a hopeful sense could define and serve as the mission behind U.S. foreign policy. The focus of deliberation is the notion that there are means to find a morally justifiable way of making binding collective decisions in the face of continuing moral conflict. This is a fundamental issue within the conflict between Islam and democracy. With the theory of deliberation and its emphasis on dialogue in a practical sense, a mutual respect among Muslims could be valued.

This last chapter will state my conclusions and provide recommendations on how to achieve the goal set forth in the conclusion, along with a brief rationale for those recommendations. The list of recommendations is neither comprehensive nor specific and is offered irrespective of economic interests. It is a broad list of recommendations by which I think U.S. policymakers should aim for in an attempted approach for a peaceful commingling of Islam and democracy with an emphasis on deliberation.
Conclusions

Democracy has developed over time. Just as it has gone through many different stages in the past, it will continue to evolve and to improve in the future. Along the way, it is hopeful that it will be shaped into a more humane and just system, one based on righteousness and reality. If human beings are considered as a whole, without disregarding the spiritual dimension of their existence and their spiritual needs, and without forgetting that human life is not limited to this mortal life and that all people have a great craving for eternity, democracy could reach its peak of perfection and bring even more happiness to humanity. Islamic principles of equality, tolerance, and justice can help it do just that.

Americans need to be mindful of the extent to which Islam is entwined with politics throughout the Muslim world. This connection may pose problems, but it is a reality that cannot be changed by mere appeals for secularism. The U.S. should avoid the Manichean formulation adopted by G.W. Bush that nations are either “with us or with the terrorists”; that is not what is going on, any more than Islamism is what bin Laden calls “a struggle between Islam and unbelief.” The option I strongly recommend, and wholeheartedly suggested, is that an attempt to have deliberative discussions in the Muslim world will have an effect on a potential change of not Islam itself, but rather the human understanding of Islam, laying the groundwork for a possible Muslim Reformation and the eventual emergence of a far reaching and hopeful politics at once authentically Islamist yet also authentically liberal and democratic. The encouragement of deliberative dialogue should be an important objective of U.S. foreign policy. Yet, on the other side of the token, it should not be the sole objective.
Policy Recommendations

The following brief recommendations are being made to connote deliberation within Islam. This list is neither comprehensive nor specific and is offered irrespective of economic interests. It is a broad list of recommendations by which I think U.S. policymakers should aim for a peaceful com mingling of Islam and democracy with an emphasis on deliberation.

1. The first recommendation is for Presidential support of U.S. foreign policy with its primary objective to be the promotion of deliberative democracy.

2. The second recommendation is educating U.S. leaders to be fully informed of the Muslim World, its people, culture, religion, and politics. U.S. leaders must be taught this subject, in its own right, with its own curriculum, and reinforced through leaders of major religious groups, senior level policy-makers and international political leaders. The American government and its voice need to be discussed over the airwaves, on television, in print in the Middle East and the U.S. The media need to demonstrate that the Muslim world and America can build together, and achieve a more diverse bridging of the gap between the U.S. and the Muslim world. Educating U.S. leaders would require changes in the philosophy on how the "war on terrorism" is currently perceived by the Presidential administration.

3. American foreign policy should be based not only on our own national interests but also on the fundamental values of the American people: freedom, justice, equality, and democracy.
4. American foreign policy must suit the demands of a global power with global responsibilities. America must start leading again across a broader agenda, in more places, and with a wider definition of our national interest.

5. America must restore the substantive as well as the geographical reach of our foreign policy, showing the world that we understand a simple truth: all terrorism is evil, but not all evil is terrorism. For the vast majority of people in the world, the greatest danger is not al Qaeda. It is localized armed conflict over political power, resources, and ethnicity. It is also poverty, disease, and environmental destruction. These scourges claim exponentially more lives each year than terrorism does. They should matter to Americans as much as Americans expect our concerns to matter to others.

6. The U.S. should be seen as a peacemaker again, actively engaged in the resolution of conflicts from the Middle East to Southeast Asia to Central and West Africa, helping to build the peacekeeping capabilities of other nations, and willing to continue giving of money and troops, alongside our allies, when our interests and values are at stake. Even when the chances are small, such efforts help reveal that American power can serve the common good.

7. U.S foreign policy should recognize that U.S. leadership is determined as much by our commitment to principle as by our exercise of power. Foreign policy is the bridge between the U.S. and the world, and between the past, the present, and the future. The U.S. must grasp the forces of change, including the power of a restless and unpredictable new generation that is coming of age throughout the world. Trust and confidence in U.S. leadership and intentions are critical to shaping a vital global connection with this next generation.
Islamists and other social leaders should find some way of setting forth a critique of Muslim society that will galvanize a call for change. The U.S. should contribute to this effort by beginning to engage overseas Muslims vigorously, including those Islamic clerics who enjoy great respect and authority as men of uncompromised integrity. Both sides will benefit from deliberative dialogue. Given the importance of deliberation and the current issues involved and the realities of the situation, the initial litmus test for being included in the conversation should be limited to a prohibition on incitement to terrorism and advocacy of war.

The U.S. Department of State defines foreign policy on each of the four interrelated goals of U.S. foreign policy: stability, security, democracy, and prosperity. The events of September 11 focused U.S. attention on the connection between the failure of political institutions in many Muslim countries and the rise of political extremism and terrorism. The absence of institutions of democracy and civil society, especially interdependent channels for constructive participation and peaceful dissent, has resulted in growing frustration, anger, and alienation among many Muslim populations. The ordinary men and women in the Muslim societies must be the focus of a concerted campaign if the war against terrorism is to succeed. Part of that campaign includes adequate foreign assistance. Unfortunately, the U.S. has for a long time stinted on its foreign assistance obligations, failing to meet the minimum standards recommended for developed countries.

"The peoples of the Islamic nations deserve the same freedoms and opportunities as people in every nation," President Bush declared in a commencement speech at West Point last summer. He's right. Any claims of a "clash of civilizations" based on
fundamentally different political goals held by Western and Muslim societies represent an oversimplification of the evidence. Support for the goal of democracy is surprisingly widespread among Muslim publics, even among those living in authoritarian societies. Yet Huntington is correct when he argues that cultural differences have taken on a new importance, forming the fault lines for future conflict. Although nearly the entire world pays lip service to democracy, there is still no global consensus on the self-expression values such as social tolerance, gender equality, freedom of speech, and interpersonal trust that are crucial to democracy. Today, these divergent values constitute a clash between Muslim societies and the West.

Peace, prosperity, and freedom are some of the fundamental principles that fuel the unique form of U.S. foreign policy. American has a long tradition of acting on core values and promoting ideals like freedom of speech, the right to vote, freedom of religion, and a free press that so often challenge the power of dictators and ideologues. Unlike the leaders of unfree societies, America believes that economic and political freedoms, human rights, and opportunity are not privileges to be handed out by the elite to those they favor; they are rights of every man and woman that must be protected and promoted. As Henry Kissinger once observed, "No foreign policy—no matter how ingenious—has any chance of success if it is born in the minds of a few and carried in the hearts of none."\(^2\) U.S. foreign policy succeeds precisely because it is based on values carried in the hearts of multitudes. These values are not uniquely American, but universal and global in their appeal. They do not seek to impose specific cultural norms, but rather provide the tools and freedom for each society to realize its own potential based on its own cultural, ethnic, and religious traditions.
The United States cannot expect to foster democracy in the Muslim world simply by getting countries to adopt the trappings of democratic governance, such as holding elections and having a parliament. Nor is it realistic to expect that nascent democracies in the Middle East will inspire a wave of reforms reminiscent of the velvet revolutions that swept Eastern Europe in the final days of the Cold war. A real commitment to democratic reform will be measured by the willingness to commit the resources necessary to foster human development in the Muslim world. Culture has a lasting impact on how societies evolve. But culture does not have to be destiny. In the end, it is inevitable in my hope that U.S. foreign policy is and will be aimed at the promotion of deliberative dialogue in the Muslim world.

The Muslim peoples are increasingly alienated from their own governments, many of which are highly ineffective, corrupt and authoritarian. If the Muslim world is to exit the 21st century with self-confidence, peace, and stability, governments in the Muslim world must find new modes of politics that operate on popular participation and consultation rather than coercion.

In many regions of the Middle East, The U.S. is perceived as particularly close to and protective of some of the least democratic countries in the world. The U.S. should not allow authoritarian regimes to justify their repression of all opposition movements as a defense against “fundamentalism” or “extremism”. It is precisely dictatorship and authoritarianism that fuels extremism and radical change. Change is coming, and it is in our American interest as well as in the interest of peace and stability in the world that this change be gradual rather than abrupt, peaceful rather than violent. To achieve this, the U.S. needs to be a persistent advocate of political and economic liberalization, including
a greater allowance for civil society. There is only one long-term solution: making
governments more accountable to their citizens through the rule of law, guaranteed
freedoms, and free and fair elections.

Building good relations between the U.S. and the Muslim world requires
nurturing more respect toward Islam and Muslim civilizations and cultures. U.S. policy­
makers must be better informed on Islam, a religion and civilization that is, and will
remain, a powerful force in the new century. The Middle East policy team needs to be
reorganized in order to bring greater understanding, balance, and diversity of viewpoints
in the policymaking process. We need to initiate and encourage a civilizational dialogue
with the people of the Muslim world.

Underpinning our national security and foreign policy is the power of democratic
ideals and values. I strongly believe that the spread of democracy and respect for the rule
of law helps to create a more stable, peaceful, and prosperous world community.
Democratic governments are more likely to cooperate with each other against common
threats, more likely to encourage freer trade, more likely to promote more sustainable
economic development, more likely to protect the rights of their people, as well as
overseas visitors. America has learned over the past century that helping to prevent
nations form failing is far more effective than rebuilding them after a crisis. Helping
people stay in their homes is far easier than feeding and housing them in refugee camps.
Helping relief agencies and international non-governmental organizations strengthen
conflict resolution is much better and far easier.

As a final comment, the answer to the question asked by this thesis - Is Islam
compatible with democracy? – is unquestionably ‘yes’. That answer will come into its
own reality when, as the central theme of Chapters Three and Four states, deliberative dialogue is applied practically in the Muslim world. Therefore, our American foreign policy must step up to the plate and acknowledge the practical and non-threatening means to deliberate rather than utilizing deadly force to provide a formidable solution to the atrocities of the Muslim conflict. Through the promotion of deliberative dialogue among the Muslim world, greater problems will be solved. It is synergistic. And when the United States reaches that conclusion, we will have collectively arrived at a higher moral level of civilization in America and abroad.
Endnotes


2 Ibid.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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