

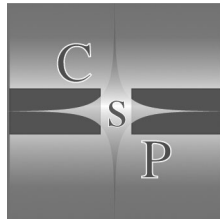
# The Arab Authoritarian Regime between Reform and Persistence



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Edited by

Henner Fürtig



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	vii
INTRODUCTION ( <i>Henner Fürtig</i> )	viii
PART ONE	1
PAVING THE WAY FOR DEMOCRACIES OR STRENGTHENING AUTHORITARIANISM? REFORMS IN THE MIDDLE EAST <i>Martin Beck</i>	
1. Introduction	1
2. Democracy, Democratisation and Liberalisation	3
3. The Debate on the Middle East?	6
4. Actors of Reform Processes	12
5. Reforms – Transmitters for Democratisation?	18
6. Options for the West	22
7. Summary	24
PART TWO	
CASE STUDIES	
Chapter One	26
Transformation to persist: Political Reform in Egypt since 9/11 <i>Henner Fürtig</i>	
1.1. Democratic Criteria in Theory and Egyptian Practice	27
1.2. Reform Work in Progress: The Regime’s Political Tactics	31
1.3. Egypt as an exemplary “liberalised autocracy”	54
Chapter Two	57
Reform without Adjustment: The Syrian Style of Economic Opening <i>Anja Zorob</i>	
2.1. Trade Liberalisation, Export Promotion and Adjustment	58
2.2. Syrian Reforms in the Past: Basic Characteristics and Outcomes	64

2.3. What the Future Holds: Continued “Muddling Through” or Effective Adjustment?	77
Chapter Three	87
The Moroccan Balancing Act: Modernising the Society while Pre-serving the <i>makhzan</i> System <i>Hanspeter Mattes</i>	
3.1. The authoritarian <i>makhzan</i> system: despotic reforms no constitutional change	88
3.2. Measures to reform the Moroccan society under King Muhammad VI	92
3.3. The prospects of enhanced political and economic reforms	100
Chapter Four	103
Rhetoric vs. Reality in Palestine’s Political Development <i>Marcus Marktanner, Emile Sahliyah, Susan Goedeken</i>	
4.1. Dimensions of Rhetoric vs. Reality in Palestine’s Political Development and the Palestinian Cause	103
4.2. Political Development in Palestine – Corruption and Obstruction?	104
4.3. The Arab-Israeli Conflict and Arab Authoritarianism – Cause or Pretext?	112
4.4. The Agenda of the European Union and the United States in Palestine – Vanity Fair and Bodyguard Diplomacies?	129
4.5. Findings	133
PART THREE	137
CONCLUSIONS <i>Henner Fürtig</i>	
APPENDIX	143
Bibliography	144
List of Contributors	150
Index	153

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Leverage Points of External Democracy Promotion in the Middle East	22
Table 2: Tariff Rates in Arab Mediterranean Partner Countries	72
Table 3: Trade Orientation in Arab Mediterranean Partner Countries, 2003	75
Table 4: Investment Climate Indicators in Arab MPCs, 2005/06	77
Table 5: Economic Growth and Per-capita income in MPCs, 2000-2003	79
Table 6: Permanent Autocracies, Democratising Countries, Successful Democratisers, and Democratisation Reversers (1960-2003)	116
Table 7: Regional Distribution of Permanent Autocracies, Democratisation Events, Successful Democratisers, and Democratisation Reversers	119
Table 8: Average Values of Explanatory Variables for Different Regions and Regime Types	120
Table 9: Scatter Plots of Polity against Refugee Density, Primary Export Share, Remittances, and Migrant Stocks	122
Table 10: Spearman Rank Correlation Matrix	124
Table 11: Scatter Plots of Polity against Per Capita Income	125
Table 12: Multi-nominal Logistic Regression Results (Reference=Permanent Democracy)	126
Table 13: Classification Table of Model III	128

## INTRODUCTION

The project of democratising autocratic regimes in the Third World in general and in the Middle East in particular is largely not a result of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11). On the contrary, after the last major cut in world history, the end of the Cold War, Western politicians and intellectuals also propagated a “New World Order”, a “Third wave of democratisation”, the “Triumph of Western Values” and so on. But in the following decade, Third World autocracies learnt to adapt to Western pressures in this regard. In particular, Middle Eastern regimes figured out that the West finally preferred stability and the containment of Islamic militancy to uncertainty caused by democratic “experiments”.

In addition to many other lessons, 9/11 proved the failure of this unwritten agreement. Based on the experience that democracies don’t wage wars or war-like militant actions against each other, the American political establishment came – for the time being – to the conclusion that only a sincere advancement of human rights and democracy in the Islamic world would – in the long run – avoid a repetition of 9/11-like events. What divided the U.S. administration in this initial phase was the method of achieving the common aim. At all events, the first Bush administration chose direct political engineering, even by military means, whereas the more dovish factions continued to favour civil incentives. Thus, the war against Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship in 2003 became the first visible proof of the hawks’ strategy and indeed probably a model and example for further enforced removal of autocratic regimes, i.e. a catalyst of democratisation. Few if any Arab regimes simply ignored the pressure. Rather, they claim to have initiated a basic reform process.

As a result, two competing academic camps regarding internal development in the Middle East have emerged. On the one hand, optimists are arguing that the winds of change have finally arrived in the Middle East and that Arab authoritarian regimes cannot avoid basic change. On the other hand, pessimists are convinced that we are witnessing just another round of democratic rhetoric lacking any element of real change. Any attempt to solve this philosophical dispute is idle since even sophisticated social science models are incapable of exactly predicting the future development of highly complex research objects such as political systems. Whether democratic change is coming in the Middle East is an empirical rather than a philosophical question. Thus, scholars should focus on analysing recent events and formations in the Arab World in order to

identify trends based on empirical observations. For this purpose, theories are indispensable. Yet, they need to be flexible instruments guiding empirical research rather than tools simply confirming allegedly definite knowledge of the Middle East.

Thus, the question of whether Arab countries have actually launched reforms is only preliminary: most of them have. Therefore, the core question that this book attempts to answer from different angles, perspectives and levels is whether the proclaimed reforms are rhetorical or real, radical or rather cosmetic, and, even more importantly, whether they lean towards the promotion of democratisation or rather foster the authoritarian regimes.

In Part One *Martin Beck* contributes to the answer from a more theoretical perspective. His contribution is divided into seven chapters. After an introductory elaboration of the research question in chapter one, he clarifies in chapter two in what way the application of the concept of democracy to the Middle East makes sense although Israel is the only democracy in this world region. Moreover, the scope of terms relating to democratisation, especially liberalisation, is defined. In chapter three, two prominent theories explaining Middle Eastern resistance to democratisation are discussed: the cultural approach focusing on Islam as the independent variable and the rentier state approach according to which authoritarianism in the Middle East is the result of a specific income structure. Thereby, the logical evolvement of these theories requires us to ask whether and to what degree the general conditions changed under which the authoritarian leaders of the Middle East make their decisions on internal reform. Thus, it is discussed extensively in what way 9/11 changed the strategic environment of authoritarianism in the Middle East.

In chapter four, the author attempts to characterise the strategic situation of reform policies in the Middle East by focussing on the main actors involved in the reform process. Since both the ruling elites and the main oppositional groups are not democratic in the Middle East, how is it *possible* at all to achieve democratisation? In fact, the chances of democratisation by design are very low in this world region. Yet, there is a certain chance of promoting democratisation by default: since authoritarian systems are fairly inefficient both in economic and political terms, the ruling elites are frequently exposed to crisis situations. According to the logic of authoritarian elites, crises can be managed either by oppression or by liberalisation. The latter strategy implies an increase in freedom. Yet, paradoxically an authoritarian system implements liberalisation to consolidate the authoritarian system rather than to encourage transition to democracy. However, in a complex world even rational actors are not always able to properly assess all the major effects of their policies. Thus, although liberalisation in

the context of authoritarian rule is intended to avoid democratisation, it may trigger exactly this outcome.

Chapter five discusses the issue of reform from another angle. After having looked at reform by focusing on the actors involved, the author now attempts to focus on reform policies as such: How are the reform policies of Middle Eastern elites to be assessed in the light of the antagonism between democratisation and liberalisation? In the following chapter, four Western strategies to promote democratisation of the Middle East are presented in the light of the rationalistic logic of the rentier state approach and the constructivist logic of the cultural approach, respectively: conditional payment of rents, conditional institutional support towards moderate Islamists, promotion of “good governance,” and the introduction of an obliging critical dialogue. Part One ends with a brief summary.

While the first part provides a certain framework and model of reference, Part Two aims at enriching our understanding by means of case studies. The cases were selected for the following reasons: Egypt is still the “core” of the Arab world and thus the first logical candidate to be analysed. The Maghreb is represented by Morocco while the Mashreq finds a convincing example in Syria. The Middle East conflict has such a formative influence at the entire region that its inclusion was more or less “imperative.” Furthermore, the different scientific orientations of the authors were highly welcome. Thus, political scientists, an historian and an economist contributed and added their specific views and modes of interpretation.

Not by accident, *Henner Fürtig's* chapter on Egypt opens the series of case studies. Firstly, Egypt is an exemplary autocratic state, secondly, it regards itself as the leading Arab nation and, as such, is indicative of general Arab (un)willingness to comply to external pressure, and thirdly, it risks alienating long-time Western partners particularly the U.S. if it resists the democratisation campaign. Therefore, the main objective of the chapter was to find out whether the Egyptian regime has given in to the pressure and is transforming itself and the entire society significantly, or whether it is simply practicing “window dressing” and lip-service once again. Initially, Robert A. Dahl's seven-criteria-catalogue of a democratic society (elected representatives, free elections, the universal right to vote and stand for election, plus the freedom of opinion, information, and association) was taken as an instrument to measure the level of political reform in Egypt since 2001. Especially parliamentary elections, the political parties' law (and its modifications in 2005), the work of the party tribunal, the way of nominating candidates, the limits of independent monitoring,

and the privileges of the ruling party were examined, and culminated in an analysis of the 2005 Presidential and Parliamentary elections.

This analysis resulted in the assessment that the Egyptian regime resorts – as before – to populism and sloganism and sets the the limits of political reform there where its survival is at stake. Once again the regime proved to be extraordinarily experienced in adapting to internal and external challenges. Basically unchanged since 1952, it has mastered several regional wars, numerous international crises, murderous attacks against its representatives, and a decade of underground war in the 1990s. The chapter came to the conclusion that – so far – the transformation process in Egypt is not a preliminary stage of the real transition to democracy, but an astonishingly successful attempt to avoid it. For that reason, Western pressure will end in a cul-de-sac as long as it does not create conditions under which a gradual transition to democracy would appear the most reasonable solution to the regime itself.

*Anja Zorob's* chapter on Syria puts a greater emphasis on economic aspects. She begins by citing a report released by the Syrian State Planning Commission in 2005 that described the period of 1996 to 2004 as “lost years” because of the slow growth of the Syrian economy in those years. At the same time, the challenges Syria faces are immense. Among them are the high and rising unemployment rate as well as depleting oil reserves, which constitute the most important source of revenues. Against this background, calls for an acceleration of economic as well as political reforms have intensified in recent years. Since Bashar al-Assad took over the presidency in 2000, some major measures of adjustment and liberalisation have been introduced. In 2005, the transformation to a “social market economy” was set as a target in the recommendations presented by the Baath Party conference as well as in the draft version of the tenth five-year-plan.

However, as the author assessed, the measures implemented so far have not translated into higher growth and badly needed improvement of living standards for the Syrian population. On the contrary, reforms are believed to have furthered the creation of new channels for rent-seeking activities to the benefit of a few private businesses with close links to the ruling elite. Furthermore, there seems to be neither a strategy for transition nor a clear understanding of the requirements of a market economy system. To make it worse, the basic factors hindering economic adjustment and liberalisation in former reform phases, among them political insecurity in the region, are still present. This is aggravated by mounting international pressure on Syria with the imposition of US sanctions in the framework of the so-called Accountability Act and the issuance of United Nations resolution 1559. The UN resolution does not only confront Syria with the threat of further international economic sanctions, but has already

postponed the final signing of an association or partnership agreement with the European Union. Therefore, this chapter asks in which ways sanctions are influencing prospects for economic reform and adjustment. In addition, it analyses to which extent the draft partnership agreement with the EU will effectively be able to fulfil the role of a catalyst and/or anchor of economic reforms.

In his chapter on Morocco *Hanspeter Mattes* stresses – in similar fashion to his co-authors – that adaptations or “reforms” in the Moroccan kingdom have not changed the structure of the political system. Therefore, he laid more emphasis on those reforms that may at least function as prerequisites for political liberalisation. Reforms in the sectors of religion, justice, and security as well as reforms concerning political participation may develop such a quality. If the state’s policy agenda supports the process of modernisation and breaks with its traditional obsession of control, the structural opening up of the system might be initiated. In Morocco such a change in policy orientation is actually underway in the sectors of religion and security.

Reform in the religious sector started in the spring of 2004 with the restructuring of the Ministry for Habous and Islamic Affairs. The reform was basically designed to solve a contradiction. On the one hand, the King wanted to modernise the Moroccan society, but on the other hand the religious establishment (e.g. imams, leading officials of the Ministry for Habous and Islamic Affairs) and the Islamists massively manifested their opposition to such measures. The chapter emphasises the role of King Muhammad in modernising the religious sector against the opposition of the religious conservative circles and the Islamists and in creating a new institutional setting for further reforms.

In the sensitive security sector significant changes started for the first time in spring 2005. The King broke with a more than forty-years-old tradition and nominated a civilian to head the Moroccan intelligence services. By introducing civilian control and enhancing transparency in the security sector the Moroccan head of state demonstrated his commitment to “good governance”. The chapter analyses the reforms in this sector since spring 2005 and correlates these reform steps with the general policy of liberalisation in Morocco under King Mohammed VI, i.e. the relation between the liberalisation efforts and the preservation of political stability.

*Marcus Marktanner, Emile Sahliyeh and Susan Goedeken* conclude that the rhetoric of democracy building prevails over real reforms in the Palestinian Territories. The authors insist on the assessment that political reforms in Palestine cannot be analysed independently from the Arab-Israeli conflict and its international dimensions. The multiple participants involved in the promotion of democracy, be it the Palestinian Authority, the Arab World, the European Un-

ion, the United States, or even Israel, all have various rationales for their posturing. Because the Arab World, the United States, and the European Union are major stakeholders in this process, the authors also explore to which extent those players' rhetoric concerning Palestine reflects true intentions and how their policies affect its political development.

Marktanner et al. argue that Palestine's political development is uniquely interlinked both with the transition of the Palestinian Liberation Organization from a militia to a political agent and the presence of Israel on Palestinian Territory. In analysing this dimension, special emphasis is first given to the role that the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Fatah, and Arafat have played in shaping Palestine's political institutions. These institutions were characterised by a lack of checks and balances and the development of cronyism and favouritism. From a second perspective, the authors analyse how Israel's occupation has undermined Palestine's prospects for the development of a civil society and successful political consolidation.

As the Arab-Israeli conflict ranks high on all political leaders' agendas, the scope of the chapter is then widened to include an analysis of the extent to which the Arab-Israeli conflict affects political development beyond Palestine's borders. The authors argue that the Arab-Israeli conflict favours the conservation of authoritarian regimes in the wider region. There are important differences in the transmission mechanisms though, as there seem to be aggressive and defensive political abuses. Aggressive authoritarian leaders use the Palestine question in order to pretend there is a state of war that can be won only by a strong authoritarian leadership. Defensive authoritarian leaders, on the other hand, claim that the introduction of electoral procedures would lead to destabilising importation of the Arab-Israeli conflict because of the widespread sympathy with the Palestinian cause, which political leaders claim to contain. The authors examine in particular the credibility of defensive authoritarianism from various angles. They discuss the plausibility of this logic qualitatively and assess it empirically. Their results suggest that the Arab-Israeli conflict is more a pretext for Arab authoritarianism rather than being its cause. Other factors, especially the region's economic structure and the economic role of the state, explain Arab authoritarianism much more convincingly.

Marktanner et al. move on then to scrutinize the European Union and United States' rhetoric towards Palestine and compare it to their concrete actions on the ground. Sketching the evolution of their foreign policies from the 1970s, the authors conclude that although one can detect a greater pro-Palestinian rhetoric in Europe than in the United States, on the ground there remains a problematic pro-Israel bias. In practice, the US stresses more the need for democratisation in the Palestinian Territories and stands firmly behind Israel. Europe's rhetoric, on

the other hand, more strongly defends the need to implement the Palestinian's rights, but never seriously confronts Israel.

Four major findings connecting the different parts conclude the book. The appendix contains a bibliography, an index and gives some additional information on the contributors.

Henner Fürtig  
Hamburg, January 2007

## PART ONE

# PAVING THE WAY FOR DEMOCRACIES OR STRENGTHENING AUTHORITARIANISM? REFORMS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

MARTIN BECK

### 1. Introduction

The first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century brought the issue of democratic reforms in the Middle East back to the forefront. On the one hand, as an optimist one could argue that the winds of change had finally arrived in the Middle East and that Arab authoritarian regimes could not avoid basic change. On the other hand, from a pessimistic perspective one could claim that we were just witnessing another round of democratic rhetoric lacking any element of real transition to democracy. Any attempt to solve the philosophical dispute as to whether the glass is half-full or half-empty is a waste of time since even sophisticated models developed by social scientists are incapable of exactly predicting the future development of highly complex research objects such as political systems. Whether democratic change is on its way in the Middle East is an empirical rather than a philosophical question. At the same time, a sound theoretical basis is indispensable for analysing and assessing structures and trends based on empirical observations.

The potential contribution of theories to the research on internal political developments in general and democratisation in the Middle East in particular are manifold. Within the framework of the present article, the following four dimensions of theoretical work will be made valuable. Firstly, theoretical concepts give account of the methodological questions and help to clarify basic terms such as democracy and democratisation (chapter two). Secondly, social science theories can help us to understand the necessary and sufficient conditions of such a thing as democratisation. On this basis, one can ask which of these conditions have (not) been fulfilled in the Middle East (chapter three). Thirdly, theories are a tool to assess actual reforms in the Middle East: Do they suggest that

democratisation is being promoted or do they tend that authoritarian regimes are being fostered (chapter four and five)? Finally, theories can help us to decide what we, as members of Western systems, ought to do (chapter six).

With the exception of Israel there are no democracies in the Middle East. Thus, it is important to ask whether it is at all appropriate and useful to apply the idea of democracy to analysing political systems in the Middle East. In other words, chapter two seeks to find out what kind of added value is to be expected from applying a European-rooted concept to the Middle East.

Are there any indicators that the general conditions are new under which the authoritarian leaders of the Middle East make their decisions on internal reforms? Thus, the guiding question of chapter three is to analyse in more detail in what way the situation at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century distinguishes itself from earlier periods. Firstly, the theoretical argument according to which the lack of democracies in the Middle East reflects a difference in culture will be examined. On the one hand, this argument lost credibility in the later twentieth century as authoritarian regimes in many non-Western areas underwent transition processes to democracies. On the other hand, the argument gained some persuasiveness exactly because no other (major) cultural area seems to be left which declines to participate in the global process of democratisation. Secondly, the aggression committed by Al-Qaida on September 11, 2001, marks a difference as well. There can be hardly any doubt that the character of the Western debate on how to deal with the Middle East drastically changed after these terror attacks. Yet, the question to be raised is whether the new quality of the debate on democratising the Middle East reflects a new policy or rather is primarily rhetoric designed to mask rebottled old wine.

Chapter four and five will deal with the link between the abstract idea of democracy and democratisation on the one hand and the assessment of more concrete reform policies in the Middle East on the other. Thereby, chapter four will focus on the strategic situation of the actors that are playing major parts in reform processes in the Middle East, whereas chapter five will ask how reform processes might be assessed given the background of (prospects for) democratisation. Particularly, in chapter four it will be argued that the Middle East is a region in which the powerful actors inside and outside the ruling elites are non-democratic. Therefore, liberalisation processes, which must be strictly distinguished from democratisation processes, paradoxically exhibit a potential for triggering democratisation in the Middle East. In chapter five, this very potential-and its limits-will be illustrated.

In chapter six it will be asked how Western actors may contribute to the promotion of democratisation in the Middle East, before the article concludes with a brief summary of its main findings.

## 2. Democracy, Democratisation and Liberalisation

### 2.1. On the Application of the Concept of Democracy to the Middle East

According to an often cited definition coined by Larry Diamond et al., democracy refers to a specific type of political system which is characterised by at least three features: competition over power positions, indiscriminate political participation among adults through regular elections, and a basic level of civil and political rights.<sup>1</sup> Although this “minimalist” definition encompasses political systems with different specific political, social and cultural backgrounds, there can be no doubt that the political systems of the Middle East are far from meeting any criteria of democracy.<sup>2</sup> The Arab Middle East plus Iran and Turkey stands out as a world region that has not generated any single democracy.<sup>3</sup>

There is a wide consensus that the concept of democracy is suitable for empirical analyses of the political systems of Europe and North America, whereas a normative debate is being fought as to whether it is also applicable to Middle Eastern systems.<sup>4</sup> With the exception of Israel, whose cultural roots are European, the Middle East historically developed a political culture of its own which is, despite interconnections between orient and occident, simply different from the Western tradition. From this finding it is sometimes concluded that Middle Eastern systems should not be assessed on the basis of a concept that is perceived as “Western.” Although this is not the place to contribute to the normative debate between universalism and relativism, it is important to emphasise that one must carefully observe the distinction between the empirical and normative dimension of democracy. Thus, even a relativist scholar who opposes the applicability of the democracy concept to the Middle East from a normative

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<sup>1</sup> Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset, “Introduction: Comparing Experiences with Democracy,” in Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset (eds.), *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1995), pp. 6-7. See also Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> As has been mentioned, Israel is an exception which in the following of this article will not be included in the term “Middle East.” Thus, for the purpose of this article, the world region of the Middle East is defined as the Arab World plus Iran and Turkey.

<sup>3</sup> Freedom House: *Map of Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: Freedom House, 2006), available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2006&country=7077>.

<sup>4</sup> See the debate in “Journal of Democracy” on “Islam and Liberal Democracy”, particularly the contributions of Bernard Lewis, “A Historical Overview,” *Journal of Democracy*, 7(1996)2, pp. 52-63; Mohamed Elchachmi Hamdi, “The Limits of the Western Model,” *Journal of Democracy*, 7(1996)2, pp. 81-85.

point of view, would acknowledge that the political systems of the Middle East are in fact non-democratic according to the definition presented above.

Moreover, what must be carefully avoided is to mix up the empirical with the normative dimension of the idea of democracy by adapting the definition of democracy to the empirical realities of the Middle East. In other words, the term “democracy” refers to *one* specific type of political system: Although the idea of democracy was developed by (West) European philosophers during the Enlightenment, there is no such thing as a “European” – or “Oriental” – democracy. Strictly speaking, also the commonly used term “liberal democracy” is problematic: Since far-reaching liberal elements are an integral part of the definition of democracy, the auxiliary-term “liberal” is tautological at best. Yet, if “liberal” is taken as a qualifying term, one can easily be misled into believing that there are also other kinds of democracies such as “socialist” or “oriental” democracies. To conclude, whatever one believes about the universality of democracy from a normative point of view, it should be clear that democracy as a term on which empirical research is based requires universal validity.

The relevance of this finding is beyond scholastic interest. At the latest since the end of the Cold War, Western power hegemony over world affairs implies an ideological dimension. Thus, those who overtly reject basic “Western” ideas such as the concept of democracy are in danger of being excluded from the civilized world. One way of avoiding such an outcome is simply to pay lip-service to democratic values without obeying them.

## **2.2. The Added Value of Research Based on the Concept of Democracy to the Knowledge of the Middle East**

What is the potential benefit of applying the theoretical concept of democracy to the Middle East although no democracies exist in this world region? From the normative point of view of a universalist who is in favour of democracy, this question is easy to answer: The application of the concept of democracy can be used as a powerful tool to blame the ruling elites of the Middle East of denying their people access to basic political rights. From an empirical perspective, however, the benefit of applying the concept of democracy to the Middle East is less obvious since the result of a comparison between democratic systems and political systems in the Middle East will just tell us what the Middle Eastern systems are *not*. This is obviously much less than we expect from empirically oriented research.

However, also from a positivist approach that attempts to shed light on empirical reality of the Middle East, such a research program makes sense if some important non-factual considerations are taken seriously. Firstly, why has the Middle East contrary to (nearly) all other world areas been resistant to democra-

tisation to date? In other words, what are the main factors inhibiting democratic transition in the Middle East and what changes could lead to such a transition? Secondly, even though there are no democracies in the Middle East, one cannot conclude that recent transformations taking place in the region are definitely not processes of democratisation. Nota bene any reference exclusively to the past as an argument that recent reform processes in the Middle East will not lead to democratisation is not satisfactory. Such an argument is only valid if and as long as the conditions that inhibited the emergence of democracies in the Middle East in the past are still valid. Since the questions of general conditions will be dealt with in more detail in chapter three, the remainder of the present chapter focuses on methodological questions related to the applicability of the term “democratisation” to Middle Eastern politics.

If a process of democratisation takes place in an authoritarian regime, it necessarily results in a surplus of political and/or individual freedom. In other words, democratisation implies liberalisation.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the reverse relationship is not valid: What distinguishes liberalisation from democratisation in a given political system is that the former process is still controllable by the ruling authoritarian elite whereas the latter is not. Yet, what appears to be easily grasped on a theoretical level is very often difficult to prove in empirical analyses. In other words, if a researcher looks at a given reform policy “as such,” without further knowledge she or he can hardly decide whether this very policy is part of a democratisation or a liberalisation process (or both). Rather, the researcher must be aware of the general political context in which the policy measures take place.

Moreover, it must be taken into consideration that liberalisation processes in authoritarian regimes rarely occur by accident. Rather, they are usually the result of a decision deliberately taken by an authoritarian elite. As will be shown in more detail below, authoritarian regimes are notoriously subject to crisis. In such a situation, a rational authoritarian elite disposes over two basic means of crisis management: It can either react by repression or by liberalisation.<sup>6</sup> Liberalisation may help to strengthen an authoritarian rule since it can diminish pressure from below, thereby increasing legitimacy for the ruling elite. Thus, despite the surplus of freedom, a liberalisation policy in an authoritarian regime is normally a strategy of the ruling elite to strengthen its non-democratic rule.

Consequently, liberalisation is a process opposed to democratisation insofar as it is chosen by an authoritarian elite with the aim of avoiding democratisa-

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<sup>5</sup> Emma Murphy and Tim Niblock, “Introduction,” in Timothy Niblock and Emma Murphy (eds.), *Economic and Political Liberalisation in the Middle East* (London: British Academic Press, 1993), pp. xiii-xvii.

<sup>6</sup> Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

tion. However, in a complex world even rational elites sometimes overestimate their control over outcomes. Although it should be pointed out that democratisation processes might have very different causes, occasionally they are the result of liberalisation policies that go beyond control. To sum it up, although the intention of liberalisation policies is precisely to avoid democratisation, by accident democratisation may be the result of liberalisation policies.

### 3. The Debate on the Middle East?

#### 3.1. The Middle Eastern Resistance to Democratisation

The general argument that the term “democracy” refers to a concept that is only applicable to Europe and world areas that have been very intensively moulded by its culture, for example, North America and Australia, lost a lot of credibility in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As early as the mid-century, some countries such as India and Japan were a challenge to the hypothesis that Enlightenment or other specific (Western) European features are necessary preconditions for the establishment of a democracy. Yet, starting with the Portuguese carnation revolution of 1974, the so-called third wave of democratisation washed over so many world areas beyond Western culture that the phenomenon of non-Western democracies could not simply be dismissed as the exception proving the rule.<sup>7</sup>

However, even though the connection between European culture and democratisation has often tended to be overestimated in previous research, the role of Islam as a potential factor inhibiting the emergence of democratisation still may be not. In fact, as no Islamic country today is a democracy, there is a strong correlation between the two factors. But correlations are not explanations. As will be shown, the cultural approach, which claims that the major reason for the Middle East’s resistance to democratisation is that Islam as a cultural system does not lend itself to modernisation, for instance democratisation,<sup>8</sup> suffers some severe theoretical and methodological problems.

#### *The Cultural Approach*

As Simon Bromley proves in his critique of a cultural approach focusing on the factor “Islam”, it suffers from a tendency to go round in circles.<sup>9</sup> Islam is pre-

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<sup>7</sup> See Freedom House, *Map of Freedom*.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Bassam Tibi, *Islam and the Cultural Accommodation of Social Change* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Simon Bromley, *Rethinking Middle East Politics: State Formation and Development* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), pp. 16-20.

sented as a rigid or backward cultural system that accounts for Middle Eastern resistance to structural change, e.g. democratisation. At the same time, evidence of the “rigidity” or “backwardness” of the Middle East is very often based on factors derived from Islam. Many studies dealing with the connection between Islam as a cultural system and the political reality of the Middle East stand out for their strong descriptive richness. However, their explanatory power is rather limited.

Another problem related with the cultural approach is that “Islam” is difficult to define in a way that meets the standards of social science theory. Numerous sophisticated studies on Islam prove that the Islamic culture is highly complex and has developed many different sub-cultures. Thus, Islam as a factor shaping political reality tends to become indistinct because it is not sufficiently clarified what the term Islam exactly refers to. Moreover, any quantification of the term Islam is difficult. In other words, basic determinations of what a Muslim society or even a Muslim is: To what degree must an individual be devoted to God/Allah in order to be termed a Muslim?

Among the most elaborate cultural studies dealing with Muslim culture and issues of modernity are the contributions of Ernest Gellner and Bassam Tibi. Yet, Tibi fails to solve the problem of tautology since in his analysis the “rigidity of Islam” appears both as cause and effect of underdevelopment. Tibi’s attempt to separate independent and dependent variable is fairly poor: In a lapidary way, the rigidity of Islam is traced to its tendency to the absolute which, according to Tibi, characterizes all religions but Islam to a particular high degree.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Tibi does not succeed in solving the problem of defining Islam in a clear-cut way. Although he emphasises the cultural diversity of Islam, he fails to prove that all variants of Islam are characterised by the proposed rigidity to the same degree.

Although Gellner manages to avoid in his profound analysis some of the shortcomings of Tibi, especially the problem of tautology, also he fails to elaborate a fully-convincing theory. Gellner, who starts with the proposition that Islam is the last “serious faith”<sup>11</sup>, manages to present a fascinating historical analysis based on an analogy of Ibn Khaldun’s cycle theory. Yet, at the same time, he portrays Islam in modern times as an extremely diffuse set of ideas. Consequently, due to the heterogeneity of the independent variable, the power of Islam to explain current politics appears to be fairly low in Gellner’s concept.

Despite these shortcomings, both authors nevertheless prove in a convincing way that countries with clear Muslim majorities lack a tradition of secularisation. Moreover, it is a matter of fact that today religious arguments play a much

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<sup>10</sup> Tibi, *Islam and the Cultural Accommodation of Social Change*.

<sup>11</sup> Gellner, *Muslim Society*, pp. 4-5.

more significant role in the politics of (most) Islamic countries if compared to (most) Christian countries. Thereby, the evolvement of a democratic political culture is made more difficult because the encouragement of social conflict with religion is the equivalent of “upgrading one’s own claims and downgrading the claims of the adversary.”<sup>12</sup>

### *The Rentier State Approach as an Alternative*

Other explanations for the lack of democracies in the Middle East are based on factors which avoid the methodological problems of the cultural approach. The most important is the rentier state approach.<sup>13</sup> Most states in the Middle East are recipients of so-called rents, i.e. income that does not accrue from the recipient’s labour or investment. Contrary to profits, there is no need to re-invest rents in order to receive them in the future. Therefore, rents are in principle at the free disposal of the recipient.<sup>14</sup>

If a rent is monopolised by a state bureaucracy, other things being equal it will use the rent to preserve and even increase its own privileges. These rent-receiving state bureaucracies create rentier states that do not comply with the will of the majority. Rather, rentier states tend to be highly authoritarian.

Obviously, the oil-producing countries are rentier states par excellence since the bulk of their income benefits from the gap between the low production costs of oil in the Middle East and cost-intensive oil production beyond, e.g. in Alaska and the North Sea. Moreover, most Arab oil-importing countries are recipients of significant political rents since their budgets are heavily subsidised by foreign aid donated by the Gulf states, the United States and/or the European Union.

When the rent share of the state budget exceeds the critical margin of approximately 20 percent, which has been the case in many Arab countries for decades, this has a profound impact on the relationship between state and society. Instead of being forced to tax its citizens, a rentier state tends to subsidise strategic groups of the population. Consequently, the principle of the American War of Independence – “No Taxation Without Representation” – is not effec-

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<sup>12</sup> Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger, “The Impact of Faith. Does Religion Make a Difference in Political Conflict,” *Tübinger Arbeitspapiere zur Internationalen Politik und Friedensforschung* 35(1999), p. 7, available at: [www.uni-tuebingen.de/uni/spi/ab2menue.htm](http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/uni/spi/ab2menue.htm).

<sup>13</sup> Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani (eds.), *The Rentier State* (London: Croom Helm, 1987).

<sup>14</sup> Michel Chatelus and Yves Schemeil, “Towards a New Political Economy of State Industrialization in the Arab Middle East,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16(1984), pp. 251-265.

tive.<sup>15</sup> Thereby, the rent state leans towards being highly discriminatory: Although it is rare that a social group is fully ignored, the rentier state tends to distribute financial means according to strategic rather than social criteria. Thus, it is “generous” to the upper and (urban) middle classes when granting monopolies to the business sector and providing jobs in the public sector. The urban poor in contrast have to take potluck with subsidised bread.

The rentier state approach manages to avoid some of the theoretical and methodological problems, which the cultural approach is exposed to. Particularly, the rentier state approach does not have severe problems distinguishing between its independent and dependent variables. Contrary to the cultural approach, it is also able to quantify its independent variable. Yet, despite its methodological superiority, the rentier state approach also faces some serious theoretical challenges. Firstly, some cases beyond the region of the Middle East are not necessarily compatible with the rentier state approach. In particular, the approach has problems explaining the emergence of democratic structures in Venezuela in the late 1950s, which had become a fully-fledged rentier state already in the 1930s.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, not all Middle Eastern states are rentier states, for instance Lebanon and Tunisia: Although this very fact does not challenge the approach as such – which of course does not claim that rents are the only factor inhibiting the emergence of democracies – it underlines the necessity to simultaneously search for other factors to explain the Middle East’s resistance to democratisation.

The literal aim of the present contribution is not to come up with a final and definite assessment of the cultural and the rentier state approaches, respectively as an explanation for the Middle Eastern resistance to democratisation. Yet, it could be shown that the cultural approach to Islam faces severe theoretical and methodological problems that significantly exceed those of the rentier state approach. A modest conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that if reform processes in the Middle East are to be assessed in the light of its contribution to actual or potential democracy processes in the foreseeable future, no good reason exists to solely focus on the issue of how to spread democratic values in a system whose cultural basis is hostile to them. In fact, it should also be asked whether there are reform processes that diminish the power of structural barriers to hinder democratisation in the Middle East.

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<sup>15</sup> Giacomo Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework,” in Beblawi and Luciani (eds.), *The Rentier State*, p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> B. S. McBeth, Juan Vicente Gómez and the Oil Companies in Venezuela, 1908-1935 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 111.

### **3.2. Political Development in the Middle East After the Terror Attacks of September 11, 2001**

Another factor that obviously distinguishes the general Middle Eastern reform context is the fact that Western actors have been attempting to interfere in the internal affairs of the Middle East to a fairly high degree at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nota bene that the region of the Middle East has been penetrated by Western actors to a very high degree ever since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, the basic approach of the European colonial powers and later of the USA during the Cold War was to select existing elites to establish asymmetric cooperative relations rather than to leverage new social groups to power positions in the Middle East.<sup>17</sup> The axis built by Washington and Riyadh constitutes an extreme but basically typical example: In the period of the Cold War, most Western alliances with actors of the Middle East were based on purely strategic interests rather than shared political or cultural values. In the rare cases of direct intervention in the internal affairs of the Middle East after the Second World War, the USA did so in order to support traditional elites, e.g. 1953 in Iran and 1991 in Kuwait. Moreover, there were cases in which the USA cooperated with actors in the Middle East whose primary qualification was to be the enemy of an enemy of the USA, for example, the USA's support of Saddam Hussein's Iraq during the first Gulf War in the 1980s. Even when democracy promotion became more prominent on the U.S.-American foreign policy agenda after the end of the East-West confrontation, altering the authoritarian structures of the political systems in the Middle East was not a priority in Washington's policy towards the region. However, the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 basically altered the U.S.'s perception of the Middle East – as well as its own policy approach towards the region.

The instantaneous reaction of the U.S.-Administration was to demand unconditional support for its fight against terrorism. Accordingly, those regimes which the U.S. Administration considered non-cooperative were either militarily attacked (such as Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003) or “pariahised” as “rogue states” or members of the “axis of evil” (such as Syria and Iran). Be it for strategic reasons or out of conviction, most Middle Eastern regimes cooperated extensively with the USA in the area of counter-terrorism. Thus, at first glance, as a result of the terror attacks of 9/11, U.S. American support for the authoritarian structures of the Middle East seemed simply to be sustained. In fact, international cooperation in the immediate area of counter-terrorism re-

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<sup>17</sup> L. Carl Brown, *International Politics and the Middle East: Old Rules, Dangerous Game* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

quires cooperation with ruling regimes, thereby strengthening them, be they authoritarian or not.

However, the shock of the terror attacks of 9/11 simultaneously made Western scholars and politicians increasingly aware of the close relationship between strengthening authoritarian regimes by cooperating with them and the growing danger of trans-national terrorism. When President George W. Bush issued his ultimatum towards Iraq on March 17, 2003, he hardly dissembled that his predecessors contributed to the emergence of terrorism by claiming that “in the 20th century, some chose to appease murderous dictators, whose threats were allowed to grow into genocide and global war.”<sup>18</sup> Yet, only when the U.S. American “Greater Middle East Initiative” (GMEI) was published by the Arab daily newspaper Al-Hayat on February 13, 2004, did it become apparent that the White House’s strategic thinking plumbed new dimensions. The GMEI, which in the modified version of the BMEI (“Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East”) became a transatlantic initiative in June 2004, clearly envisioned the establishing of fully-fledged democracies in the whole of the Middle East.<sup>19</sup>

In the 20th century, U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East did not go beyond mere paying lip-service to democratisation. Thus, it is pertinent to ask whether it is likely that the GMEI and BMEI will ever amount to anything other than pure rhetoric. Although it is too early to assess the degree to which these initiatives truly altered the Western foreign policies towards the Middle East, one crucial difference in the general conditions for reform policy in the Middle East should be emphasised. As a result of the terror attacks of 9/11, Western interest in democratising the Middle East for the first time in history is egoistic rather than altruistic. Former programs to promote democracies were more or less motivated by the wish to bring some utility to other societies. Yet, according to the logic of GMEI and BMEI respectively, the actual beneficiaries of these initiatives are supposed to be Western societies themselves. The theorem of “Democratic Peace” stipulates that democracies refrain from waging war on one another. Therefore, according to this theorem, the best way to combat terrorism in the long run would be to democratise the Middle East. In other words, the logic behind GMEI and BMEI is a policy of egoistic “securitisation.”<sup>20</sup> A

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<sup>18</sup> George W. Bush, “President Says Saddam Hussein Must Leave Iraq Within 48 Hours,” *Remarks by the President an Address to the Nation*, March 17, 2003, available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030317-7.html>.

<sup>19</sup> The GMEI and BMEI are available at: <http://english.daralhayat.com/Spec/02-2004/Article-20040213-ac40bdaf-c0a8-01ed-004e-5e7ac897d678/story.html>; and <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/fs/33375.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> The term “securitisation” was coined by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security, A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998), Chap. 2.

democratised Middle East would deprive terrorist groups of their political basis (since other channels to accomplish political influence would be available) and conflicts with the West would be dealt with in a non-violent manner.<sup>21</sup>

However, the theorem of “Democratic Peace” only applies to fully-fledged consolidated democracies rather than systems undergoing a process of democratisation. Moreover, in the process of democratisation, the risk of violent conflict is even exacerbated. The reason behind this is that dynamics aroused by a democratisation process increase the chances for involvement not only for democratic but also non-democratic groups. Only when a democratic system is consolidated, does it depose over institutions that balance the high degree of popular participation and mobilisation.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, from the Western perspective democracy promotion in the Middle East is an ambivalent process. If successful, the final result perfectly suits the security interests of the USA and Europe. However, since the establishment of any democracy is necessarily preceded by a process of democratisation, the short-term costs may discourage the West from promoting democratisation processes in the Middle East.

In the last century Western demands for the Middle East to democratise were hardly more than mere rhetoric. Since 9/11, however, there has been an intrinsic Western interest in a democratised Middle East. However, since democratisation of the Middle East appears to be ambivalent from the Western point of view, it would be exaggerated to conclude that there is no way for the Middle Eastern regimes to escape from Western pressure to democratise. However, reform pressure on the Middle East has significantly increased. Thus, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Middle Eastern political elites act under an externally cast “veil of uncertainty” that covers the true expectations of the West regarding Middle Eastern reforms.

## 4. Actors of Reform Processes

### 4.1. “Democracy Without Democrats?”<sup>23</sup>

How are the findings of the previous chapters reflected in the strategic situation of the actors involved in reform processes in the Middle East? Those who an-

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<sup>21</sup> If a strict definition of democracy is applied, the democratic theorem is empirically saturated. Yet, the explanation of the theorem is still disputed (see Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller (eds.), *Debating the Democratic Peace* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, “Democratisation and the Danger of War,” *International Security* 20(1995)1, pp. 5-38.

<sup>23</sup> Ghassan Salamé (ed.), *Democracy Without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World* (London: IB Tauris, 1994).

nounced reforms in the Middle East, i.e. the ruling state bureaucracies, are not genuinely interested in democratisation. Privileges related to power positions are by definition limited in a democratic system, since, firstly, they are allocated only for a limited period, and, secondly, because all political positions are checked and balanced by others. Thus, the authoritarian elites of the Middle East would make a bad bargain if they traded in their existing regimes for democracy.

At the same time, the Middle East lacks strong social forces pressuring for democratisation. In comparison to other world regions, the civil society there is not well developed and the political orientation of many social actors is authoritarian rather than democratic. Thus, the civil society of contemporary Middle East is not in a position to force through democratisation by pressure from below.<sup>24</sup>

According to the rentier state approach, the main reason for the weakness of non-state actors in the Middle East is that material resources are unevenly distributed between state and non-state actors. Since both the economic oil rents and political rents are accrued by state bureaucracies, the “regular” material relationship between state and society is softened. In a “production state,”<sup>25</sup> the state depends on society to make donations in the form of taxes. Yet, if a state bureaucracy receives (very) high rents from abroad, it is in a position to levy little or no tax. Thus, the relationship between state and society in the rentier state tends to result in a reversed dependency structure: Since a rent is at the recipient’s free disposal, the state is in a position to subsidise social groups. Contrary to production states, these subsidies are based on a genuine allocation policy rather than one of re-allocation (i.e. a policy of extracting taxes from one group of the society, then donating it to another one).

Although taxation, needless to say, is not a sufficient condition for democratisation and the establishment of consolidated democracies, it is definitely a very favourable one. Moreover, since social groups in the rentier state tend to depend on the state, justice rather than freedom is the major political issue in such a system. A rational individual can only afford to demand governmental non-interference if his or her economic well-being is not closely related to the distribution policy of the state. Thus, justice, i.e. “fair” distribution of rents, is usually the most popular demand in a rentier state.<sup>26</sup> This implies that the state is supposed to interfere actively in societal affairs, thereby also controlling political

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<sup>24</sup> See Richard Norton (ed.), *Civil Society in the Middle East: Volumes 1 and 2* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1995/96).

<sup>25</sup> Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework,” p. 63.

<sup>26</sup> Needless to say that “fairness” is a highly ideological concept in the political culture of a rentier state. In principle, all social groups in a rentier state tend to dress up rent distribution policies favouring their own specific interest as “fair.”

life. To put it in a nutshell, political culture in rentier states is driven by justice rather than freedom.<sup>27</sup>

Authors of the cultural approach agree with the fact that neither the ruling elites nor the most powerful opposition movements are democrats. Their explanation as to why differs, however: It is the specific role of Islam as a cultural system deeply influencing the political culture of the Middle East that inhibits the emergence of strong democratic movements. Since Islam blocks the acceptance of the democratic idea that one's own claims are in principal not superior to those of others, the acceptance of a democratic value system is underdeveloped in Islamic societies.

Thereby, the remarkable strength of Islamist movements in the Middle East is a phenomenon that cannot be explained only by the cultural approach. Rather, this phenomenon can also be integrated into the rentier state approach. The concept of justice, which plays an important role in the logic of a rentier system, is prominent in Islam. For instance, in the form of "zakat," Muslims are obliged to donate to those who are needy. Moreover, a rational interpretation of the major role of Islam in contemporary politics in the Middle East is that, firstly, contrary to other oppositional ideologies such as Marxism that proved to be of limited value for mobilising the "Arab street", concepts involving Islam are suitable for doing so; secondly, the conquest of the mosque as a political space was a rational response to the authoritarian state's ability to destroy Western-styled political structures such as the headquarters of political parties.

Thus, if both the rentier state and the cultural approaches agree that the Middle East lacks actors with an intrinsic interest in establishing democracies, is a democratisation policy in the Middle East promising at all? How the problem of promoting democratisation in a political environment in which democrats are powerless can be solved? According to the structural-rationalistic logic of the rentier state approach, a democracy can result when two roughly equally strong social groups competing for power decide to conclude a "democratic pact" in order to avoid a bloody civil war. If a ruling state bureaucracy and a challenging counter elite are stuck in a situation in which neither is able to prevail over the other without risking elimination, the risk-averse moderate representatives of both groups may decide to allow the people to choose who fills political positions. According to this perspective, democratisation and even the consolidation of democracies are possible without democrats.<sup>28</sup>

In the recent history of the Arab Middle East, there are two prominent examples of general elections that the ruling elite failed to control enabling the

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<sup>27</sup> Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Iran's Turn to Islam: From Modernism to Moral Order," *Middle East Journal* 41(1987)2, pp. 202-217.

<sup>28</sup> Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market. Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

opposition parties to emerge as winners: Algeria in 1991/92 and Palestine in 2006. In both historic cases, however, democratisation processes were not strengthened. In Algeria, the primary reason was that hardliners dominated in both political camps instead of moderates so that Algeria sank into one of the bloodiest civil wars in Middle Eastern history. In the special case of Palestine, it was mainly the lack of stateness and the absence of international legitimacy for the winning Hamas Party that inhibited the intensification of the democratisation process that began with the elections. However, despite the negative final outcomes of the cases, they prove that also in the Arab world authoritarian elites sometimes overestimate their control capacities to such a degree that democratisation by default is a *potential* (though to date it has not been achieved) development.

According to the constructivist logic of the cultural approach, non-democrats must be turned into democrats as a necessary pre-condition for a promising democratisation process. The starting point for such a process is when non-democratic decision-makers pay lip-service to democratic values for tactical reasons. Since the implosion of the Soviet Union, the USA and their European supporters have constituted by far the most powerful political camp on the globe. As a result, the Western systems also enjoy ideological hegemony. In order to avoid isolation, any regime – be it as undemocratic as it is – has a strong incentive to officially declare its commitment to democratic values. Under favourable general conditions such a declaratory policy may trigger a process in which a ruling elite gradually becomes entrapped in a democratic discourse. According to the “spiral model” as developed by Thomas Risse et al., originally non-democratic leaders may end up in a democratic prison that they cannot escape from. Logically, it is also possible that in the course of the debate non-democratic leaders become incurably infected by democratic values.<sup>29</sup>

How can a process of democratisation be triggered in a system without democrats? Both from the rationalist and the constructivist point of view, liberalisation policies are the by far most likely events proceeding democratisation processes in the Middle East since, as has been argued above, liberalisation may unintentionally result in democratisation. According to the rationalist approach, liberalisation policies may strengthen counter-elites up to a degree that they are in the position to challenge the privileged position of the ruling class. Alternatively, constructivism says that liberalisation processes might also strengthen those who truly (start to) believe in democratic values, whether in civil society

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink (eds.), *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Thomas Risse, Anja Jetschke and Hans Peter Schmitz (eds.), *Die Macht der Menschenrechte: Internationale Normen, kommunikatives Handeln und politischer Wandel in den Ländern des Südens* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2002).

or the state bureaucracy. The implementation of liberal measures requires intellectuals, some of whom may just be cynical bureaucrats who perceive liberalisation as a vehicle both for fostering authoritarianism and their individual political careers. Some others, however, may start to press ahead with the program because they tend to believe in the superiority of the underlying values of liberalism and democracy.

#### **4.2. Liberalisation as the Crisis Management of Authoritarian Regimes**

Why at all do authoritarian regimes sometimes introduce liberalisation measures? If we assume that ruling state bureaucracies are rational actors, they should be aware that such a policy potentially threatens their own privileges. Yet, both the economic as well as the political efficiency of authoritarian systems is fairly limited. Consequently, authoritarian elites are frequently disposed to severe crisis: In economic terms, authoritarian regimes are rarely capable of maintaining an efficient market economy because the free allocation of production factors implies that strong social groups develop who are capable of challenging the authoritarian structures of the political system. Moreover, since in authoritarian systems, contrary to democracies, participation rights and legal ways of contributing to policy alterations are limited, authoritarian regimes periodically go through participation crises: Since in authoritarian regimes access to political decision-making is by definition limited to privileged groups, those who are underprivileged have a genuine interest in replacing the ruling elite, thereby transcending the formal structures of the political system.

Authoritarian elites who face an economic and/or political crisis, in principle have two options available to them. Firstly, they can react by curtailing economic freedom and/or oppressing groups demanding participation rights. Although such a policy is absolutely compatible with authoritarianism, sometimes the negative repercussions are significant not only from perspectives of the authoritarian political elite itself but also from viewpoints outside it. If the degree of repression is increased, the legitimacy of the ruling elite suffers and in some cases it may lose control over the opposition. Ultimately the authoritarian elite may suffer its worst fear and be toppled. Thus, some moderate segments of authoritarian elites tend to develop an alternative strategy according to which liberalisation is a more efficient way of stabilising the authoritarian system than repression. As long as participation-oriented social groups can be controlled and/or are subject to cooptation, economic liberalisation appears to be an efficient way for an authoritarian system to overcome an economic crisis because it increases the material basis of its legitimacy. Also political liberalisation is a promising strategy for an authoritarian elite. If some oppositional groups go for