

[be careful what you wish for]

Democracy & Its Discontents

Voting doesn't produce peace—much less desirable outcomes—in societies that lack the foundations of a liberal order.

By Leon Hadar

AS THE NAZIS were about to capture power in the aftermath of the last democratic parliamentary elections in Germany in March 1933, there was no indication that the German Communist Party was mounting any concerted response, reflecting the belief among its leaders that the new Nazi-dominated government was the “dying gasp of moribund capitalism” and that Hitler’s government would create the conditions for a “revolutionary upturn” and accelerate the momentum toward a proletarian revolution. The expectation that the Nazis would help ignite a Communist revolution made sense at that time, if one was a Marxist believing in a doctrine that assumed that realities were predetermined by political and economic forces—that sooner or later the Good Guys were bound to defeat the reactionary capitalists and their agent, Hitler. Progress was on the march. The rest was just details.

Just details like the electoral victory of the radical Shi’ites in Iraq, or the win by Hamas in the Palestinian elections, or the strengthening of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Freedom is on the march in the Middle East according to the proponents of the grand ideological doctrine known as Democratic Peace Theory (DPT), which has been the driving force behind the U.S. war in Iraq and the push for democracy in the broader Middle East. And around the globe: just

choose the color of your revolution. Suck up to those in Washington in charge of distributing funds for democracy promotion and choreograph a colorful media event displaying a lot of cool stuff. If that doesn’t work, dispatch a sleazy Chalabi-like operator to Washington and hire some lobbyists, and before you know it the Marines will “liberate” your country. You then become part of the larger story of a war of liberation *à la* Iraq, where a brutal dictator was unseated so that democracy could be installed as a model for the entire Middle East. Forget that the Iraqis didn’t greet their liberators with flowers. Forget those missing weapons of mass destruction and the more than 2,000 fallen Americans and who knows how many dead Iraqis. Just fix your eyes on the Democratic Peace Prize.

Indeed, Communism may be dead, but in Washington devotion to a grand ideological doctrine remains as powerful as ever. If you listened only to George W. Bush’s many let’s-make-the-world-safe-for-democracy sermons you would have to conclude that a historic “revolutionary upturn” has taken place in Iraq that will be accelerating the tempo toward a democratic revolution in the Arab world. For Bush, who apparently keeps Nathan Sharansky’s *The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror* next to his bed, democracy is the cure for most

of humanity’s ills, ranging from political violence and economic underdevelopment to male baldness. Even in its more modest version, the global democratic crusade adopts what the neocons consider to be an axiom of international relations—that democracies rarely, if ever, wage war against one another. Translating that maxim into policy means that Washington has the obligation, based not only on moral considerations but also on pure self-interest, to promote democracy worldwide as the most effective way to establish international peace and stability. In his second inaugural address, Bush proclaimed, “the survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world.” Democracy would not only respond to the legitimate demands of those living under authoritarian systems but also reduce the chances for domestic instability and international wars and retard the spread of terrorism. Not surprisingly, a huge complex of government agencies have become instruments for democracy promotion, with Republicans and Democrats alike subscribing to the catchy slogan “Make Democracy, Not War.”

If you dare to challenge the need to treat democracy promotion as a core national interest, members of the foreign-policy community will treat you as a

cynical Machiavellian who just doesn't get it. After posting on my blog a critique of the Democratic Peace Theory, a political-science professor wrote, "It's like studying world geography, and despite Columbus and Magellan and Drake and modern cartography and trips into space and satellite photography, they are still using maps without the Americas, but instead a big vast emptiness between Europe and Asia. You can't do science this way!" From this perspective, DPT, like Marxism, acquires the characteristics of a hard science whose mysteries only qualified experts can explore.

Friedrich Hayek, winner of the Nobel Prize in economics, warned of what he called "scientism"—the imitation in the social sciences of the methods of the physical sciences. And as a political scientist, I'm very skeptical about the notion that DPT is a field of scientific inquiry. Indeed, the intellectual graveyards of the 20th century are packed with dead social-science theories that were overrun by events, ranging from Marxism and eugenics to convergence and interdependence, not to mention the numerous scientific theories that had given birth to America's bankrupted welfare programs. At the end of the day, it's the real world where social

science is tested, and when it comes to DPT, the Middle East has become a laboratory with Iraq serving as a test tube for the experiment. And it's a test that seems to be failing.

Foreign-policy analyst Fareed Zakaria argues that free elections taking place in societies that lack the foundations of liberal political culture—which includes all of the Middle East—tend to

rise to illiberal regimes and makes the region safe not for liberal democracy but for nationalism and other combative forms of identity. Hence the ousting of Saddam Hussein and the free elections helped to consolidate the power of the leaders of Shi'ite and the Kurdish separatists. Similarly, the celebrated Cedar Revolution in Lebanon was just another round in the competition between the

NEOCONSERVATIVE FOREIGN POLICY IS BURSTING WITH SELF-CONTRADICTION. IT URGES WASHINGTON TO ESTABLISH A HEGEMONIC POSITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, WHILE IT CALLS FOR FREE ELECTIONS THAT EMPOWER FORCES OPPOSED TO THE AMERICAN HEGEMON.

produce non-peaceful "illiberal democracies." Similarly, in a new book, *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War*, Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder pull the intellectual rug from under the rationale presented by the Bush administration for what it's doing in Middle East, arguing that states in the early phases of democratic transition or "emerging democracies" that tend to have weak political institutions, such as a free judiciary or press, are actually more likely than other states to become involved in war. And international-relations experts point out that authoritarian governments were responsible for maintaining relative peace in Europe in most of the 19th century.

But one doesn't need to apply complex theoretical models to figure out that the main cause of wars in the modern age has been nationalism and that its most powerful ally has been democracy, which empowers people to rally behind their national ethnicity, religion, and tribe and helps drive political figures who thrive during times of civil wars and wars between nation-states. When it comes to the Middle East, a process that challenges the current authoritarian regimes and permits free elections gives

many religious sects and their warlords. Moreover, the rise of Hamas in Palestine and the potential for the strengthening of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Islamist movements in other Arab countries reflect the bankruptcy of secular Arab nationalism. What is not clear is why Washington should force Arab countries to hold elections that will bring to power anti-American regimes.

In a way, neoconservative foreign policy is bursting with explosive self-contradiction. It urges Washington to use its military power to establish a hegemonic position in the Middle East, while at the same time it calls for holding free elections that empower forces opposed to the American hegemon and its allies. In Turkey, South Korea, Brazil, Chile, and Bolivia, free voting has resulted in the election of political parties that are less than enthusiastic about American's goals. That free elections in the Middle East region, where hostility towards the United States is reaching the stratosphere, would bring to power illiberal and anti-American forces shouldn't surprise anyone.

As they confront realities that repeatedly defy their rosy scenarios, the democratic crusaders are sounding more and



more like the Marxists of Germany in the '30s. They are always ready with a spin that transforms what looks like a worst case into an historic success. So the Shi'ites are in the process of establishing a theocracy in southern Iraq, the Kurdish nationalists in the north are preparing to secede, the Sunnis are turning their areas into havens for Osama's jihadists, and the whole of Mesopotamia may be on the verge of a civil war? Have faith in America's values and be idealistic about our vision. According to Bush, Iraq's struggles to forge a "democratic future" are comparable to the troubles the United States had while establishing its own constitutional government. Speaking from Philadelphia last December, Bush aimed to invoke the image of America's own Founding Fathers in support of Iraq's new political leaders. He didn't go as far as comparing Grand Ayatollah Sistani to Thomas Jefferson—but did come close. "Our Founders faced many difficult challenges. They learned from their mistakes and adjusted their approach," Bush said.

When Palestinian and Israeli officials frantically lobbied in Washington for the postponement of the parliamentary elections in the West Bank and Gaza, noting that polls pointed to a possible victory by Hamas, America's top democracy cheerleader, Condoleezza Rice, was dismissive of those Middle Eastern naysayers. "Holding free and fair Palestinian Legislative Council elections on January 25 represents a key step in the process of building a peaceful, democratic Palestinian state," Rice said in a Jan. 11 statement. "Development of a Palestinian democracy based on tolerance and liberty is a key element of the Roadmap," she insisted. You have to believe that if you build a democracy, they will come. And on Jan. 25, Hamas came. ■

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Who Elected Hamas?

We did—with help from the Israelis and Fatah.

By M.J. Rosenberg

THE NIXON-CHINA analogy is growing stale. Every time an extremist takes power anywhere, the starry-eyed immediately trot out the "but it took Richard Nixon to go to China" example as evidence that the newest ideologue to win an election will pull a 180 once he's in office.

Using this logic, Hamas, now that it has been elected to lead the Palestinian legislature, is in a position both to make peace with Israel and to make it stick, something the more moderate Fatah could not do.

Unfortunately, the Nixon analogy probably doesn't apply here. Nixon was a pragmatist, not an extremist. Nor was his opposition to recognition of the People's Republic of China the centerpiece of his worldview. He did recognize China but only because he wanted to. At this point, there is no evidence whatsoever that the leaders of Hamas—in contrast to many of the people who voted for them—want normal relations with Israel. That does not mean they won't move toward a policy of peaceful coexistence, but if they do, it will not be by choice but because Hamas feels compelled by outside pressure or, more likely, internal necessity.

The bottom line is that there are very few silver linings in the Hamas victory. Striking, however, is the success of the election itself. International observers, led by the U.S. National Democratic Institute, deemed the election "free and fair." In its report following the election, NDI stated, "through the high turnout in these elections and in the 2005 Presiden-

tial election, as well as the notable participation in five rounds of municipal elections in the last year, Palestinians have clearly demonstrated a commitment to democratic elections." So much for the canard that Arabs are somehow inherently resistant to free voting.

On the other hand, the election results may put the lie to the Bush administration's view that democratic elections are, by definition, a good thing. Hamas, an organization best known for blowing up civilian buses, won fair and square, suggesting that sometimes elections, in and of themselves, can be problematic—especially if parties competing in them are not required to foreswear violence.

The other silver lining—one that still remains to be tested—is that Hamas can restore order to the West Bank and Gaza. The Bush administration and the Israelis have both repeatedly demanded that the Palestinian Authority dismantle the independent militias and confiscate their arms. That is likely to happen now, but it is not Hamas's arms that will be confiscated as the Americans and Israelis demanded. They will instead be the confiscators.

So how did this happen? Even Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice claims not to know, saying that her analysts somehow dropped the ball by not predicting the Hamas victory.

The fact is that it was eminently predictable and perhaps even inevitable in the sense that the actions of Fatah, the Americans, and the Israelis made it so.

First, Fatah. The Palestinians were tired of Fatah's corruption and cronyism.