

# Neoconservatives and the Arab Spring

On the potential blessings and lurking hazards  
of a much-hoped-for revolution

By Joshua Muravchik

**B**E CAREFUL what you wish for," it is said. Are neoconservatives soon to regret their wish for democratization in the Middle East? This was the very issue that thrust them into prominence in the early 2000s, and it gave neoconservatism a second lease on life after a decade of quiescence in the wake of the Cold War. It was said that President George W. Bush's strategy to defeat terrorism by ousting radical regimes and spreading freedom in the Middle East reflected the capture of his administration by "neocons." In truth, neoconservatives inside his government did not have their hands on the levers of policy, and the strategy seems to have been the president's own. But it was akin to things that had been advocated by some neocon writers, myself included, for many years. And neoconservative intellectuals outside the administration

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became highly visible spear-carriers for Bush's approach.

This precipitated a sharp split between neoconservatives and hard-headed Israeli analysts who had long been their allies and friends. While neocons saw democratization as a balm to soothe the fevered brow of the Arab world, Israeli strategists (with the notable exception of Natan Sharansky) thought this utterly naive. Their message in essence was this: you do not know the Arabs as we do. Difficult as their governments are to deal with, they are more reasonable than their populations. Democratization of the Arab world would lead to radicalization, which would be a bane to you and us. (This split was studiously ignored by the new wave of conspiracy-minded hate-mongers like Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer and Andrew Sullivan, who claimed that neoconservatives were acting wholly in the interests of Israel. In fact they often said that neoconservatives were in particular devoted to the service of Israel's Likud Party—whose spokesmen, in contrast to some on the Israeli left, were especially adamant that spreading democracy among the Arabs was a fool's errand at best.)

The Israeli argument was akin to that of highly skeptical American and European conservatives. They

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said flatly that the problem with the Arabs went to the depths of their culture and could not be solved by political reform. More profound change would be required. Certainly a religious reformation within Islam might do the trick, but how could this be effectuated, especially from outside the faith? Others seemed resigned to a clash of civilizations, whatever that might mean. The neoconservative rejoinder did not deny that the problem lay deep but focused on what could be done about it. Perhaps Arab culture might be influenced in a way that would encourage its transformation. Democratization was less far-reaching than religious reformation or an anti-jihad jihad, but certainly it could influence a people's habits of thought. Witness how different Japan and Germany are today from the recent past.

That was the logic of the neoconservative position when it came to pushing for democratic change in the Arab world. The Bush administration adopted that position in the months after 9/11 and the president's 2002 National Security Strategy statement spelled it out. But 2005 and 2006 did not give democratization supporters much cause for hope. The victory of Hamas in Palestinian elections, the strong showing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egyptian elections, and the failure of the political process inside Iraq to put an end to the spiraling violence there put Bush's democratization project on hold. The project was then utterly laid to rest by his successor, Barack Obama, who was determined above all to eschew anything that smacked of promoting Americanism. There it lay for two years until December 17, 2010. On that day, a policewoman in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, slapped an unlicensed fruit peddler, who proceeded to set himself on fire in protest. That ignited an explosion that has blown the status quo of the Arab world to kingdom come—to the surprise of neoconservatives and everybody else.

**T**HESE events, while exciting and inspiring, are also frightening, even to some in the region who were staunchly opposed to the incumbent regimes. The revolutions have proclaimed the goal of democracy but might not achieve it, and they might inflame the conflict between the Arabs and Israel, and possibly other regional sore points.

Gradual transition would have been safer. In 2005, one of Egypt's leading liberals told me he would

concede the point of regime apologists that Egypt might not be ready for democracy. But he believed it could be made ready in 10 years by starting with bona fide free elections at the local level.

Instead, we have had revolutions. And most revolutions end badly. The French, Russian, Chinese, and Iranian revolutions, to name a few, produced tyranny more awful than the regimes they had displaced. This, too, was the experience of the Arab world, which has had its share of revolutions, to disastrous effect. The first and modal one was the takeover of Egypt in 1952 by Gamal Abdel Nasser's Free Officers movement. That was followed by the Algerian uprising against France; upheavals in Iraq and Syria that ended in rule by the Baath parties; Muammar Qaddafi's seizure of power in Libya; and two turnovers in Sudan, one more leftist, the second more Islamist. The net effect was to make the region less free, more violent, and poorer than it would have been.

That history created this paradox: the Middle East's most liberal regimes are among the surviving monarchies of Morocco, Kuwait, and Jordan. The region as a whole is by far the least free in the world, but within it the variance is clear: on Freedom House's scale of freedom, where a score of 1 is best and 7 is worst, the Arab world's monarchies average a rating of 5—which is within the range, albeit barely, of what Freedom House calls “partly free.” But its “republics” average 6, squarely defined as “not free.” With the exception of Bahrain, all the revolutions of the Arab Spring have taken place within these “republics.” In other words, the region's various monarchies have managed to retain greater legitimacy than the heirs to the revolutions that overthrew their neighboring royals.

This in itself gives us real cause to worry about the outcomes of today's upheavals, and it is compounded by other worrisome signs. Democracy is widely saluted, but it is less widely understood. Public opinion polls in recent years throughout the Arab world have shown broad support for “democracy” ... and for sharia, although none of the respondents explain how popular sovereignty and divine sovereignty can be practiced simultaneously.

This year's Egyptian protests were spearheaded by the inspiring April 6 Movement, a youth group that grew out of Kifaya (“Enough”), a coalition that

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crystallized in opposition to Mubarak’s awarding himself yet another term of office in 2005. Those roots were, and are, problematic. Kifaya’s spokesman, Abdel Halim Qandil, was a leading intellectual apologist in Egypt for the ideas of Egypt’s most totalitarian former ruler, Gamel Abdel Nasser. And Kifaya’s leader, George Ishaq, was a former Communist who gave scant sign of having rejected that creed.

“The liberals have failed to form a true ideological party that knows the street language of the people,” lamented Shady Ghazali Harb, an Egyptian who has labored to create such a group. This plaint, true enough, is another way of saying that “the street” does not understand or fails to embrace the ideas of liberalism. The problem, however, is not only at the grass roots. The redoubtable blogger Sandmonkey recently described the current treatment of Mubarak in the Egyptian news media:

[S]lowly but surely the perception of him as the traitor who helped assassinate Anwar Sadat in order to take power and neutralized Egypt for 30 years during which he kissed Israel’s ass in every conceivable way in order to ensure his survival and U.S. support is being formed. Go to any newsstand any day and read the headlines. By the time he gets tried, and he will... he will be branded as the biggest traitor in the country’s history.

In other words, the same papers and many of the same reporters who for decades identified Mubarak as the source of all good now depict him as the source of all evil. The former was not journalism suited to a democracy, but neither is the latter.

**I**F EVEN sophisticated and educated Arabs, such as those who work for newspapers, have an uncertain mastery of democracy, they know still less about economics—which bodes ill for the creation of the necessary adjunct to any democratic system, a relatively free market. Part of this is the result of the accident of Arab geography. How money is made and how private income is distributed are questions distorted in the Arab consciousness by the strange reality in their part of the world where great pools of wealth abound but

very little of it is created through human labor or ingenuity. It just seeps from the ground.

As a result, the rulers of oil-rich states can do things that other governments cannot. When regional unrest began, the Saudi government drew \$36 billion from its reserves to fund a basket of pay raises, housing subsidies, and other benefits for a citizenry already well cosseted by state subsidies. The king of Bahrain gave each Bahraini family \$3,000. Libya’s Qaddafi promised every family \$400 and doubled the pay of public employees. The emir of Kuwait bestowed each of his subjects with \$3,500 in cash, plus free food for a year. And the sultan of Oman announced the creation of 50,000 new “jobs,” with duties to be determined later.

It is difficult for non-oil-rich countries like Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Yemen to match that level of payoffs, but they have done what they could. They slashed taxes and duties and college tuition, raised subsidies on goods, and increased salaries—but without any resources to fund this largesse. One of the most perceptive Egyptians I know, a Copt, said to me recently, “I am not as afraid of Islamism as I am of populism.”

Now polls in Egypt show a widespread expectation that standards of living will rise in the wake of the Arab Spring: 56 percent in a Pew poll expect the economy to improve this year; 80 percent expect their household income to rise, according to a poll commissioned by the International Republican Institute. Yet there is little sign of a corresponding appreciation that the country will have to become more productive in order for the real incomes of most citizens to rise. Instead, the body politic seems obsessed with searching out the ill-gotten wealth of Mubarak and his cronies. The sums bandied about in the Egyptian press, fueled by wholly speculative stories in the *Guardian* and on ABC News, are wildly fanciful—surely Mubarak didn’t squirrel away \$70 billion. (The *Guardian* attributed this estimate to “experts,” then backed down claiming it relied on a single “expert,” and then retracted even that.) But whatever Mubarak may have stolen, the restoration of that money would make no significant difference to Egypt’s prospects and those of its 90 million people. Far more important is to reverse the flight of investment and the sharp reduction in tourism, the country’s second largest industry.

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Such mundane calculations, however, are drowned in the intoxication of “revolution,” which is being invoked in the Arab lands like a talisman. Even Sandmonkey, whose métier is iconoclasm, posted this spring that he felt “nothing but optimism...the future is AWESOME.” The other side of this same coin is an exaggerated fear of “counterrevolution.” But it is hard to picture what model the people who express this fear have in mind.

They might do well to consider the sad history of the Mensheviks, those redoubtable Russian social democrats who spent 1917 so worried about a restoration of the czar that, much to their own detriment, they unwittingly abetted the Bolsheviks' seizure of power. The 2011 Middle Eastern analogue of the Bolsheviks is the Islamists. In June some 13 Egyptian political parties, including most of the country's liberal and leftist groups, announced an electoral bloc with the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party. They agreed to work out a common slate of candidates in coming parliamentary elections.

“This coalition...will dictate the electoral outcome,” crowed Brotherhood leader Essam al-Arian. Why did groups such as the Wafd Party, the traditional embodiment of liberalism, and Ayman Nour's al-Ghad tie their tail to the Brotherhood's kite? Apparently they feared a restoration of the power of the formerly ruling National Democratic Party. But the NDP was an administrative arm of the dictatorship rather than an electoral or ideological vehicle, and it is doubtful that there is much left of it.

Since Mubarak's fall, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood has proclaimed ad nauseam its devotion to freedom and democracy (or, more precisely, “democracy based on Islamic reference,” whatever that means). Its English-language website is thick with self-descriptions of its “moderation” and avowals of its opposition to “terrorism.” But the organization has played bait and switch on these subjects before.

In 2004, the Brotherhood announced a new “initiative,” expressing its support for democracy and the rights of women and nonbelievers. Cadres were even guided to substitute the slogan “freedom is the answer” for the group's traditional “Islam is the answer.” But the slogan change lasted only a year. Then in 2007 the Brotherhood circulated a draft platform, the first ever made

public, that proposed a Sunni equivalent of Iran's system of Shiite theocracy. It envisioned a Supreme Council of Clerics with plenary authority to overrule the president of the country. The Supreme Council would have to yield to the legislative branch of the government, but only in regard to issues “which are not unambiguously [settled] by sharia laws.” In other words, whatever the clerics deemed to be covered by sharia—presumably most things, given that the constitution declares sharia to be the “main source of law”—would apparently be subject to the final authority of the holy men.

That draft platform seems never to have been approved. But neither was it superseded. Today, the Brotherhood's political actions call into doubt its commitment to democracy. Rather than seek office in its own name, it created the Freedom and Justice Party. The relationship between the two has been described by Middle East scholar Nathan Brown:

The new Freedom and Justice Party will be free, says the parent Muslim Brotherhood, to make its own choices. But the Brotherhood [like a] helicopter parent cannot resist suggesting to its offspring who the new party's leaders will be, what it stands for, how it will be organized, who should join it, and who its candidates will be. The party is completely independent in decision-making so long as it does precisely what it is told. And actually, it is not only the party that is being told what to do individual members of the Brotherhood movement have been told to join no other party and to obey movement discipline in the political realm.

The Brotherhood protests that it has no wish to take power, and originally Freedom and Justice was going to enter candidates for only 30 percent of the seats. That number has climbed to 50 percent and might go higher. If it wins anything near that, it will be able to dominate by bargaining for the adherence of marginal parties and independents, much as those groups did the NDP's bidding under the old regime.

The Brotherhood fought tooth and nail against postponing elections, which would give other parties time to organize. The Freedom and Justice Party's leader, Muhammad Morsi, denounced the advocates of

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electoral postponement as “Zionists and remnants of the former corrupt regime.” It has fought, too, against the patently sensible proposal that a constitution be put in place before voters choose a new government. The Brotherhood hopes to win a quick election for a legislature and then to have that body write the constitution, allowing the Islamists to put their stamp on the new Egypt for a long time to come.

The Brotherhood is also slippery on the subject of violence and terrorism. It long ago renounced violence, and it decries “extremism”; its website features countless articles attacking al-Qaeda. Indeed, it has been outflanked on the extremist side by a movement of “Salafists,” those who, following the radicals of Saudi Arabia, believe that everyone should live exactly as did the Prophet and his fellows. They have emerged from the shadows to form a political party and wage a campaign of violence against Egypt’s Christians.

But in May, on a day when the Brotherhood declined to participate in a national conference of the various mostly secular protest groups, it instead held a joint gathering with the Salafists. And despite its polemics against al-Qaeda, it vociferously denounced America’s assassination of Osama bin Laden. The Brotherhood did renounce violence in the 1970s, but only in exchange for the release of its leaders from prison. Since then, the Brotherhood has flourished in an ambiguous status, sometimes persecuted, sometimes winked at. Had the Brotherhood reprised its rich history of bloodshed, it would have faced ruthless repression.

In other words, the Brotherhood’s embrace of peaceful methods is tactical, not philosophical. While it eschews violence within Egypt, it is full-throated in its encouragement of violence elsewhere. As Mehdi Akef, the immediate past “general guide” of the Brotherhood explained:

The Muslim Brotherhood movement condemns all bombings in the independent Arab and Muslim countries. But the bombings in Palestine and Iraq are a [religious] obligation. This is because these two countries are occupied countries, and the occupier must be expelled in every way possible. Thus, the movement supports martyrdom operations in Palestine and Iraq in order to expel the Zionists and the Americans.

Akef was succeeded last year by Mohamed Badei, who expressed similar thoughts in sermons after taking office. Zionism, he declared in one sermon, “knows nothing but the language of force, so...improvement and change...can only be attained through jihad and sacrifice and by raising a generation that pursues death just as the enemies pursue life.” In another sermon, he made clear this approach applied beyond Israel: “It is your obligation to stop the absurd negotiations,” he urged the flock, “and to support all forms of resistance for the sake of liberating every occupied piece of land in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, and all parts of our Muslim world.”

Just as Islamism casts a cloud over the Egyptian revolution, so it does throughout the region. Tunisia is perhaps the most European-influenced of Arab countries, and its Islamist party, Ennahda, also makes a display of moderation. Yet its leader, Rashid al-Ghannushi, who returned from exile upon the overthrow of the government at the beginning of 2011, was named by a group of Arab and Muslim liberals in 2005 as one example of those who issue fatwas “encouraging the commission of terrorist acts in the name of . . . Islam.” His fatwa, they explained, “permits killing all civilians in Israel, because ‘there are no civilians in Israel. The population—males, females, and children—are the army reserve soldiers, and thus can be killed.’” Regarding its vision of Tunisia’s future, “there are colossal suspicions about Ennahda,” said Cambridge University regional specialist George Joffe. “No one believes their commitment to democracy and pluralism. Their discourse in Arabic is very different to their discourse in French.”

In Libya, the role of Islamists has been tracked in a briefing paper and articles in the British press by Norman Benotman. Benotman, a veteran of jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, was a senior leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, linked to al-Qaeda. He is today a leader of Quilliam, a courageous London-based organization of former Islamists who oppose Islamism. In the early days of the Libyan uprising, Benotman wrote that “jihadist groups . . . are nowhere near as powerful or as widespread as the Qaddafi regime has claimed.” By summer 2011, he was warning that “jihadism . . . is now emerging as a problem in the liberated areas of the country.” While both the early and later assessments contained qualifications and caveats, he clearly has grown more concerned.

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The possibility that Islamists could replace Arab governments overthrown this year is the most distressing but not the only alarming prospect in the Arab Spring. Even non-Islamist groups might opt for policies less cooperative with America and more hostile to Israel. Virtually every one of Egypt's declared presidential candidates, including the liberals, has called for either abrogating or "revising" the 1979 peace treaty with Israel. The common platform of the 14-party electoral alliance led by the Brotherhood calls for "a strategic dialogue with Iran and Turkey" and a "review of the settlement process with Israel on the basis that it is not a real peace in light of the unjust aggression and violation of the Palestinian right of self-determination."

**I**N SUM, there is danger that the Arab Spring could yield a deadly harvest. Yet there are substantial reasons to hope that it will instead produce something flourishing and beneficial. One such reason is the degree to which the protesters in Egypt, Tunisia, and notably Syria have maintained the discipline of nonviolence. Another is their focus on their own countries rather than foreign scapegoats. And even though the general Egyptian understanding of democracy is confused, there are quarters in which one can find surprising sophistication on this score. In July, 27 Egyptian advocacy groups issued "The Basic Constitutional Provisions Papyrus," a short but remarkably thoughtful document setting forth "basic principles" for a new constitution.

It calls for "sovereignty of the people"; "the separation, balance, and mutual oversight of the... executive... legislative, and the judicial" branches of government; and "diversity of the sources of legislation," in contrast to the current constitution which makes sharia the main source. It demands equal rights for "all Egyptians, women and men," it places strong emphasis on pluralism, asserting that the country's "multipl[icity of] religions, sects, confessions, ethnicities, and cultures... is the most significant source of the richness and distinction of Egyptian identity."

In addition, although only a few hundred words long, the Papyrus limns the equivalent of the U.S. Bill of Rights and also addresses issues specific to the region, such as the need to establish a school curriculum that

will educate for democracy, the banning of private militias, a deep appreciation for balancing majority rule and minority rights, and the desirability of some transitional safeguards until "a democratic system is firmly established in Egypt, perhaps over the next 20 years."

A month before the release of the Papyrus, an overlapping coalition of eight groups issued a well-wrought statement setting forth the importance of devising a constitution before choosing a new government. The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, a leader of such coalitions, also courageously warned against the current mania for retribution against the deposed authorities. In a June statement, the institute said:

CIHRS believes that guarantees for a fair trial, which all defendants in all cases must enjoy, are particularly important in the cases involving the deposed president, regime figures, and security personnel. These guarantees, most important the presumption of innocence, are of the utmost importance for arriving at the facts and learning the lessons of the grave systematic and institutional abuses of the three decades of the Mubarak era.

The contrast between the stance of this group and the calls for Mubarak's head that continue to reverberate in Tahrir Square illustrates a nuance in the political picture often overlooked in analyses that posit two main camps, Islamists and "liberals." In truth many of the secularists who rallied to the revolution are not liberals, but socialists of various stripes or adherents of other ideologies or simply people of little political sophistication who were fed up with Mubarak's interminable rule and the prospect of a dynastic succession. The good news is that both of these elements—the fully fledged liberals and the broader constellation of secularists willing to come into the streets—turned out to be much larger than anyone had imagined before this year.

This points to an important difference between the revolutions of 2011 and those a half century or more ago in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. The earlier events were military coups; these are popular uprisings. True, popular uprisings are frightening and the participants may believe foolish things. But it is hard to imagine that anyone could

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## One must recall the original reason for embracing democracy in the Middle East. It addressed the toxicity of a political culture in which despotism was the norm.

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clamp new dictatorships on these countries, as Nasser and the Baathists did back then, without a fierce battle.

A source of fear on this score is the example of Iran's 1979 revolution. As an unnamed Israeli official told the *Washington Post*, Westerners looking at today's revolutions, "see Europe 1989, we see Iran 1979." True, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini succeeded in imposing a new despotism on Iran more tyrannical than the rein of the shah, confounding many of the participants in Iran's uprising whose goal was freedom and democracy. But here is where the analogy breaks down. Khomeini established himself as the leader and icon of the revolution years before it triumphed. Iranian secularists and liberals misjudged badly in hitching their wagon to his star, thinking that once the shah was ousted, the Ayatollah would rest content as a figurehead. Instead, Khomeini exploited his charismatic appeal to crush his former allies and concentrate power in his own hands. In the Arab revolutions, however, no figures have emerged even roughly analogous to Khomeini in popular appeal.

It is also not certain that Islamists will score as well as expected in coming elections, despite being better organized than their opponents. In Egypt, the Brotherhood has been rocked by internal divisions. When it decided not to run a candidate for president, Abdel Moneim Abou el-Fotouh (perhaps its most popular leader and known for relatively moderate views) announced he would run as an independent. For this insubordination he was promptly expelled. Fotouh formed his own party, Renaissance, in opposition to the Brother's Freedom and Justice, and the other leading moderate of the Brotherhood's governing Guidance Council, Mohammed Habib, soon resigned to join him.

The Brotherhood's youth organization has been at odds with the parent body, for example, cosponsoring with secular groups a demonstration in Tahrir Square, vociferously opposed by the elders, in favor of postponing elections. One group of youth has formed its own political party, Egyptian Current, another rival to Freedom and Justice, and its leaders, too, were expelled from the Brotherhood. Some older reformers within the movement have left to form a third offshoot party, the Pioneers, and still others have formed a fourth.

Hisham Kassem, a leading Egyptian newspaper publisher and human-rights activist, notes that the Brotherhood's strong showing in the partially rigged and

partially free 2005 elections may lead to the overestimation of its current level of strength. In 2005, it was the sole repository of protest votes, and the extremely low voter turnout magnified the strength of its loyal cadres. This year, turnout will be much higher, and Kassem believes the Brotherhood will capture no more than 10 to 20 percent of the seats, which corresponds with several voter polls.

Perhaps the most important of the region's hopeful signs is the rebellion in Syria. Who would have thought that Syrians, of all peoples, would have earned the world's admiration? Yet it is hard to think of many cases in which nonviolent protestors have exposed themselves to shoot-to-kill security forces for months on end without being cowed into surrender. If these brave people persevere and drive the Assad dynasty from power, that itself would go far toward making the Arab Spring a net benefit for the region and the world.

To be sure, the fall of the house of Assad would not guarantee democracy. But unlike in Egypt—where outcomes that are worse than the old regime (worse for America, for Israel, and for the Egyptians themselves) are not hard to picture—any successor government of Syria could scarcely be more malign than the present one. It is one of the 18 most repressive in the world, a category that Freedom House dubs "the worst of the worst." It keeps its own border with Israel quiet, but it is the patron of Hezbollah and the pipeline through which as many as 40,000 to 50,000 missiles have been shipped to Lebanon to be aimed at Israel. In addition, Syria is the linchpin of Iran's drive for regional hegemony, which is the source of the region's most dire problems. Remove that asset and Tehran's whole strategy crumbles. To indulge in a bit of perhaps wild optimism, it is even possible that the overthrow of the Syrian regime, which all Iranians know is their government's closest ally, could prove to be the spark that rekindles Iran's own Green Movement revolution.

Beyond Syria, there is reason to believe the outcome of the Arab Spring will be positive. Granted, the road to democracy will be bumpy. But to speak of democracy in the Arab world is not necessarily to speak of *liberal* democracy. While Freedom House currently counts 115 "electoral democracies"—that is, countries with governments chosen in free, competitive elections—it rates only 88 of them as "free." The other 27

are “partly free,” meaning that the judiciary is not fully independent or the press is not fully free or corruption is rampant. It is not difficult to picture a country like Egypt joining the ranks of these partly free electoral democracies and remaining there for a long time. But that alone would be a big improvement and a big influence on the region, all the more so if Iraq were to settle into a similar status once American troops leave.

It is of course possible that the road will be worse than bumpy, that it will curve around to some other, awful destination in the manner of the Iranian or the Russian revolutions. Tragically, once regimes like those of Khomeini or Lenin seize power, they can hold it for generations however miserably they govern. Were that to happen in Libya or Syria, it could not be much worse than what has prevailed the last 40-odd years. In Egypt, however, it would be disastrous. But it seems unlikely that the Egyptians, aroused as they are and having lived through the Nasser experience, would succumb to a new despotism. The most likely force to impose it, the Muslim Brotherhood, has been having trouble keeping its own members in line, much less the rest of the country.

Israel will almost surely have to endure a less cooperative Egypt. And if the peace treaty is tampered with, that could be a terrible problem. But once this storm is weathered, there could be additional benefits. When a popularly elected Egyptian government faces this issue, the likelihood is that it will recognize that peace with Israel is in its own interests, which is of course what led Anwar Sadat to make peace in the first

place. In that case, the Egyptian people might, however grudgingly, come to own the peace, rather than see it as something foisted on them, and this would make it all the more secure.

Finally, one must recall the original reason that neoconservatives and George W. Bush embraced the cause of democracy in the Middle East. It was a way of addressing the toxicity of Arab political culture, in which despotism is the norm even while democracy has become predominant in much of the rest of the world. This political sickness has deep roots, in the metastasized sense of pride and twisted idea of honor that prompts Arabs to kill their daughters and sisters and consider the existence of a single non-Arab sovereignty in their midst unbearable; in the perverted religious sensibility that has led numerous Arab spokesmen to intone in recent years, “you love life, but we love death”; in the stagnation and misguided energies that have made airport scanners the principle Arab contribution to modern life.

How to change this? It cannot be through mass therapy or religious conversion or a war of civilizations. Politics may reflect deeper levels of human experience—psychological, cultural, religious—but it also can influence those strata. Democracy is not only a way of choosing governments. It is also a practice that socializes citizens and fosters beneficent habits of thought. Even partial and imperfect democratization could strongly affect the Arab world in ways beneficial not only to the Arabs themselves but also to the world as a whole. 📖