COLLAPSE OF THE ARAB SPRING: DEMOCRATIZATION AND REGIME STABILITY IN ARAB AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Security Studies

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Washington, DC
April 16, 2010
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"[There are too many rulers] who pay lip service to democracy but who see it merely as a tool they can use to reach power...The only aspect of democracy they are interested in is the ballot box, which can serve as their passport to power."

"They need to focus, rather, on laying down the policies and building up the organizations and mechanisms of democratic life, as well as on promoting the role of civil society. This should run in parallel with a resolute drive to introduce political, economic and educational reforms and to replace Goebbels-style media institutions with modern institutions commensurate with the requirements of the age."

– Tarek Heggy, Egyptian liberal intellectual

INTRODUCTION

The short-lived Arab Spring in the Middle East, lasting from roughly 2004 through the end of 2006, was a period of great hope for change in the region. During this time, there were encouraging signs that democratization was taking hold throughout the Arab world. A series of reforms began to take place in the region, including elections in Algeria, a new constitution in Qatar with direct election of a Consultative Assembly, a call for multi-party presidential elections in Egypt, and the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon. All of this occurred at the same time that the United States (U.S.) was ousting Saddam Hussein and replacing his regime with a more representative one. Optimism on the part of Arab reformers and Western countries was clear and strong. In a 2003 speech at the National Endowment for Democracy, President George W. Bush said:

In many nations of the Middle East—countries of great strategic importance—democracy has not yet taken root. And the question arises: Are the peoples of the Middle East somehow beyond the reach of liberty? I, for one, do not believe

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Champions of democracy in the region understand that democracy is not perfect, it is not the path to utopia, but it is the only path to national success and dignity.²

This was not just a president’s idle musing. Before the invasion, a well-respected American historian, John Lewis Gaddis, argued that the Bush Administration was about to implement a grand design that was both bold and conceptually brilliant:

…Bush insists, the ultimate goal of U.S. strategy must be to spread democracy everywhere. The United States must finish the job that Woodrow Wilson started. The world, quite literally, must be made safe for democracy, even those parts of it, like the Middle East, that have so far resisted that tendency.³

The arguments from the White House, backed by academia, seemed lucid, scholarly, and to many analysts, quite believable. But such optimism was not long-lived. After a short period of democratization, Arab regimes stopped the democratization that they had at first seemingly allowed from continuing to grow. It was not long before the Arab Spring quickly faded into what may now be a long winter.

Understanding the arc of events surrounding this period is important both for theory and for policy. We need to understand the Arab Spring and whether it truly represents a failure or perhaps a beginning – albeit a halting one – for the prospect of democracy in the Middle East. If democratization has controlled or even been reversed by Arab regimes, how has this occurred? Why has democratization not taken hold in the Middle East although it has in virtually every other developing region of the world? Is there something about the way Arab authoritarian regimes are structured that enables

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them to maintain their regime stability and prevent democratization from truly taking hold?

These questions have implications for American foreign policy in the Middle East, and the role that democratization plays in that policy. Understanding how Arab regimes are able to control democratization in their countries may help future policy makers to craft more effective American foreign policy in the region with regards to encouraging democratization. This knowledge may help the United States to encourage democratization that results in a successful transition to democracy, and it has the potential for the United States to learn what is necessary in the democratization process to counter the appeal that Islamist political parties appear to have in more open elections in the region.

In this thesis I will argue that the Arab Spring has indeed failed and that it did so because the systems that authoritarian Arab regimes have in place to protect their regime stability have prevented democratization from taking hold in the region. These systems, include: co-optation of the elites, maintaining control over the rules governing electoral competition, using the military as a de-facto guarantor of internal security, as well as using periods of controlled democratization.

There is an abundance of literature on the variety of systems that Arab authoritarian regimes use to maintain their regime stability. Using the Arab Spring as a case study, I will add to existing literature by providing a more recent example of how

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For the purpose of this paper, I will deal only with the Arab Middle East. These countries include: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.
Arab states use controlled democratization to maintain, and even increase, their regime stability – a technique that provides challenges for measuring true progress in the region. It will also be important to address the role that external pressure to democratize played in the case of the Arab Spring, particularly in the case of Egypt. Pressure from the United States certainly had an impact on the increase of democratization in the Middle East during this period, however, the United States’ role in the Arab Spring also helps to illustrate how Arab authoritarian regimes use the strategic role they play in Western states’ foreign policy to their advantage. In this case, when Islamist groups made gains in elections across the Arab Middle East, the United States backed off of its support for democratization, further enabling Arab leaders to stop democratization from continuing to take hold. As we will see, Arab regimes also use external powers’ desire to maintain the status quo in the region, a policy the United States unsuccessfully tried to change during the Arab Spring, as yet another tool for maintaining their regime stability.

I will begin by examining the theory regarding democratization and regime stability, paying particular attention to the aspects of these theories that relate to Arab authoritarian regimes, and how this paper will fit in with existing theory. Next, I will examine events of the Arab Spring and analyze why these events occurred, and how Arab states used controlled democratization to maintain their regime stability. Finally, I will briefly address the policy implications that the relationship between regime stability and democratization has for American policy makers and how knowledge of the Arab Spring and of how regimes use controlled democratization might help the United States to encourage successful democratic transitions in the future.
It is important that I am upfront with the main assumption that guides me throughout this thesis. Like Samuel Huntington and other scholars of democratization, I believe that “democracy is good in itself and … (conveniently) has positive consequences for individual freedom, domestic stability, international peace, and the United States of America.” This does not mean, however, that I believe that an authoritarian regime that is democratizing will necessarily become a democracy. It is also possible that such regimes will transition into a different type of authoritarian regime, or another form of government altogether. Additionally, in the case of the Arab Middle East, an Islamic democracy may not resemble Western democracies, which have a separation of church and state. Although this is not a topic of discussion for this thesis, I believe that it is important to note that I do not make assumptions regarding what an Arab or Islamic democracy will look like or how it will function. What is key, however, is that distinctions must be made between an authoritarian regime and a democratic one, as well as between terms like “liberalization” and “democratization.” Addressing the issues of democratization and regime stability are complex and filled with subtleties. It will be important to analyze these issues with clarity and eliminate the complexities and confusion while addressing the case study of the Arab Spring. The next two sections of this paper will address these issues.

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DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Before continuing on to my case study of the Arab Spring, it is important to first address the democratization process and how a state progresses from an authoritarian regime towards becoming a democracy. First, properly defining our terms is important. I will follow the definitions of liberalization, democratization, and democracy laid out by Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter in their essay “Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies.” O’Donnell and Schmitter define liberalization as “the process of making effective certain rights that protect both individuals and social groups from arbitrary or illegal acts committed by the state or third parties.” Liberalization can include freedom of speech, habeas corpus, etc., at the individual level and at the group level can include freedom of association, freedom of expression and right to dissent form government policies, freedom from censorship, and other rights.

O’Donnell and Schmitter define democratization as:

…the processes whereby the rules and procedures of citizenship are either applied to political institutions previously governed by other principles (e.g., coercive control, social tradition, expert judgment, or administrative practice), or expanded to include persons not previously enjoying such rights and obligations (e.g., nontaxpayers, illiterates, women, youth, ethnic minorities, foreign residents), or extended to cover issues and institutions not previously subject to citizen participation (e.g., state agencies, military establishments, partisan organizations, interest associations, productive enterprises, educational institutions, etc.).

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7 Ibid.
This definition is an extension of their definition of democracy, which is built upon the principle of citizenship. Citizenship revolves around the rights of people to be treated as equals and the obligation of making equality available to all citizens.\textsuperscript{9} The authors note that there is a “procedural minimum” of the necessary elements of a political democracy, which includes “secret balloting, universal adult suffrage, regular elections, partisan competition, associational recognition and access, and executive accountability…”\textsuperscript{10} It is also important to properly define de-democratization. O’Donnell and Schmitter state that de-democratization occurs when democratization’s

…prudent advocates fear the excessive expansion of such a process or wish to keep contentious issues off the agenda of collective deliberation, they may well continue old, or even create new, restrictions on the freedoms of particular individuals or groups who are deemed insufficiently prepared or sufficiently dangerous to enjoy full citizenship status.\textsuperscript{11}

An important observation regarding liberalization and democratization is that there is not a particular sequence of the processes that make up liberalization and democratization, although as I will note later in this section, scholars argue that the sequence of liberalization and democratization is important.\textsuperscript{12} In his essay, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” Thomas Carothers details the transition paradigm that was used during the Third Wave to understand democratic transitions. The first of the five core assumptions of the transition paradigm is that “any country moving away from dictatorial

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{9} Ibid, pp. 7-8.
  \item\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
  \item\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, p. 9.
  \item\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, p. 8.
\end{itemize}
rule can be considered a country in transition toward democracy."\textsuperscript{13} The second assumption is “that democratization tends to unfold in a set sequence of stages.”\textsuperscript{14} The first stage involves the introduction of political openness or liberalization, which is then followed by democratization. Then there is a breakthrough where the regime collapses and a new democratic system emerges. This is followed by a period of consolidation where state institutions are reformed, elections become regularized, and civil society grows. The third assumption is “the belief in the determinative importance of elections.”\textsuperscript{15} This is the belief that elections will help to provide the new, post-authoritarian government democratic legitimacy, and that elections will help to make the state accountable to citizens. The fourth assumption is that a transitional country’s “economic level, political history, institutional legacies, ethnic make-up, sociocultural traditions, or other ‘structural’ features—will not be major factors in either the onset or the outcome of the transition process.”\textsuperscript{16} And finally, the fifth assumption is that “the democratic transitions making up the third wave are being built on coherent, functioning states.”\textsuperscript{17}

Carothers, however, calls the transition paradigm into question, and this will be relevant to my case study of the Arab Spring. Just because a country appears to be democratizing, this does not necessarily mean that a democracy will emerge. Carothers notes that scholars often try to categorize countries that fall between being a dictatorship

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
and a well-established liberal democracy as a “qualified democracy” or other similar term. However, he argues that there are problems with trying to impose the transition paradigm on these “gray-zone cases.” Carothers argues that states that appear to be democratizing may not actually be democratizing for a variety of reasons, including what he calls “dominant-power politics.” These countries, which he says include many Middle Eastern countries, allow a degree of freedom and political space, but there is a ruling party or leader in power that has a long-term hold on power. These countries will sometimes have transitional terminology applied to them, but they do not actually transition to become a democracy because they do not actually fit the definition of a transitioning country. Additionally, Carothers argues that the transition paradigm is not always correct, and that it is not always appropriate to assume that countries will follow the five steps in the transitional paradigm, demonstrating how difficult democratization is in practice. As we will see, the Arab Spring is an example that supports Carothers’ argument.

As previously mentioned, although the Arab Spring represents a period of democratization in the Middle East, it was not the first time that this occurred in the region. Algeria’s democratization in the late 1980s leading towards local elections in 1990 represents a case of an Arabs state democratizing without external influences. The Arab Spring is yet another period of democratization in the Middle East that helps to illustrate the ways that Arab leaders use democratization as a political tool to maintain their regime stability. Anoushiravan Ehteshami discusses the use of elections by Middle

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18 Ibid, p. 10.
19 Ibid, p. 18.
Eastern leaders to protect their rule, arguing that elections have been used in the twentieth century Middle East as a way to mobilize support for the ruling regime, with examples seen in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, and Syria in the 1960s through the 1980s. Throughout these periods democratization occurred mostly through more open elections. Ehteshami argues that regimes manipulated the electoral system or electoral process in a variety of ways, including keeping opposition groups that posed a particular threat to the regime out of the elections. Ultimately, none of the previous periods of democratization that Ehteshami examined led to real regime change or to the emergence of a democracy. The Arab Spring follows this pattern.

Arab regimes that use democratization as a way of maintaining their regime’s stability are walking a fine line. Daniel Brumberg puts it best in his article on “Democratization in the Arab World? The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy:”

Because [Arab regimes] have failed to create a robust political society in which non-Islamists can secure the kind of organized popular support that Islamists command, these hybrid regimes have created circumstances under which free elections could well make illiberal Islamist the dominant opposition voice, leaving democrats (whether secularist or Islamist) caught between ruling autocrats and Islamist would-be-autocrats. Hence the great dilemma in which substantive democratization and genuine pluralism become at once more urgently needed and more gravely risky.

As we will see with the case of the Arab Spring, democratization during this period ultimately enabled Islamist groups to make political gains, which gave authoritarian leaders an official reason to stop democratization from continuing.

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In order to conduct my case study, it will be necessary to describe how liberalization and democratization are measured, which can be done both subjectively and objectively. Regardless of the method, it is difficult to effectively measure both of these things because they occur gradually and it is not always easy to tell when liberalization and democratization start, are slowed, reversed or stopped. O’Donnell and Schmitter argue that liberalization can be measured “depending on the scope of its guarantees, as well as on the extent to which persons and groups can obtain rapid and effective protection against eventual violations.”\(^{22}\) It can be difficult to specify what rules and procedures are considered more or less democratic in a country without considering the time or national context, however, O’Donnell and Schmitter note that there are two general categories or “dimensions” that can be used to measure democratization: “conditions that restrict party competition and electoral choice” and “the eventual creation of a ‘second tier’ of consultative and decisional mechanisms, more or less explicitly designed to circumvent accountability to popularly elected representatives by placing certain issues out of their reach.”\(^{23}\) Ultimately, democratization is putting the principles of democracy into practice through the use of specific rules and procedures.\(^{24}\) By tracking the creation or limitation of these rules and procedures, it is possible to measure democratization.

I will use the principles of democracy that are put forth by Renske Doorenspleet in his article, “Reassessing the Three Waves of Democratization” in my case study.

\(^{22}\) O’Donnell and Schmitter, p. 9.
\(^{23}\) Ibid, pp. 8-9.
\(^{24}\) Ibid, p. 9.
Doorenspleet argues that the two main pieces of a minimal democracy are the presence of competition and inclusive, universal suffrage at the national level. Competition can be defined in several ways, including:

- at least one executive chosen by competitive popular elections..., if all the politically active population has an opportunity, in principle, at attain an executive position through a regularized process..., “if alternative preferences for policy and leadership can be pursued in the political arena, such that oppositional activity is not restricted or suppressed...and if there are at least substantial limitations on exercise of executive power.\(^\text{25}\)

As O’Donnell and Schmitter note, democratization occurs in gradations, and measuring it can be difficult. By examining how Arab authoritarian regimes democratize through more open elections as well as steps toward universal suffrage, I will be able to measure the extent to which these countries democratized during the Arab Spring.

Liberalization will not necessarily lead to democratization—it can mark the beginning of democratization, but does not necessarily have to. However, the intended end result of democratization is the establishment of a democracy. I argue that the democratization of the Arab Spring was not successful in part because it was not preceded by liberalization. Because the individuals and groups within these states did not have sufficient freedoms, authoritarian regimes maintained the ability to control democratization, allowing them to prevent the formulation of democracies in their countries. Additionally, in cases where there is some liberalization in authoritarian regimes, O’Donnell and Schmitter state that “the innovations initially introduced by the regime rarely go beyond highly controlled (and often indirect) consultations and the

restitution of some individual rights (not extensive to social groups or opposition parties).”\textsuperscript{26}

Because of this, it will also be important to be able to distinguish between controlled democratization and actual democratization. Authoritarian leaders wanting to maintain their regime stability will allow for democratization as an attempt to legitimate their continued rule.\textsuperscript{27} Andreas Schedler, who has written several articles on the topic of controlled democratization, or what he calls “electoral authoritarianism,” argues that by holding elections these regimes try to create a façade of democracy as a way to hide the fact that they are actually still authoritarian regimes.\textsuperscript{28} Schedler finds that there are many ways that authoritarian regimes control democratization through elections.

1) The first way is by “circumscribing the scope of elective office through the use of reserved positions” by only allowing citizens to vote for political positions that do not have real authority, while keeping the “high center” of power free from elections. 2) Regimes also can control what political parties are allowed to participate in elections by excluding certain competitors. This can be done by directly banning certain parties, which is common for Islamist political parties in the Arab Middle East, or by creating policies that make it difficult for candidates to participate in an election. 3) Authoritarian states can also prevent opposition candidates from campaigning freely by limiting their

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, p. 17.  
freedom of speech, ability to peacefully assemble, or simply by denying them the ability to get their message out using the media.\textsuperscript{29}

4) Another method used by authoritarian states to control democratization is the informal disenfranchisement of certain groups of citizens. This can be done in several ways, ranging from persecution or displacement of citizens, to having stringent voter registration requirements that eliminate particular voters. 5) Rulers may also resort to using political pressure or even money to buy the votes they need. They may also use threats or violence to stop voters from freely voting for the candidate of their choice. 6) Along a similar vein, authoritarian incumbents may also use electoral fraud to assure their victory. Electoral fraud can involve fixing the election or instituting “self-serving rules of representation granting themselves a decisive edge when votes are translated into seats.” 7) Finally, Schedler argues that elections mean nothing unless voters are able to elect officials who have real power. Even if voters freely and decisively elect a representative in an open election, these elections may not be decisive after the election if the elected officials have no real authority. \textsuperscript{30}

When conducting my case study of the Arab Spring, I will measure democratization not only by examining the democratization using the steps of democratization laid out by O’Donnell and Schmitter and Doorenspleet, but also by measuring how democratization was controlled by authoritarian rulers using the measurements laid out by Schedler. This will enable me to accurately and effectively measure the events of the Arab Spring.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, pp. 42-44.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, pp. 44-45.
REGIME STABILITY AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Just as it was necessary to examine democratization and how it is used by Arab authoritarian regimes, it is also necessary to have a proper understanding of regime stability. As Mohammed Ayoob notes in his 1995 book, *The Third World Security Predicament*, most third world states suffer from “a lack of adequate stateness” that “prevents them from imposing a legitimate political order at home and from participating effectively in the international system.”

James Quinlivan takes this a step further, writing about the ways that Arab regimes protect themselves in order to maintain regime stability in the face of serious legitimacy problems. Quinlivan argues that the systems these regimes use are an attempt to make regime stability so strong that the regimes are essentially “coup-proof.” The essential systems necessary for coup-proofing, according to Quinlivan are:

1. The exploitation of family, ethnic, and religious loyalties;
2. The creation of parallel militaries that counterbalance the regular military forces;
3. The establishment of security agencies that watch everyone, including other security agencies;
4. The encouragement of expertness in the regular military;
5. Funding.

Daniel Brumberg adds to the list of systems used by Arab authoritarian states to maintain their regime stability, by arguing that these states also use periods of liberalization and de-liberalization to stabilize their regimes. Brumberg terms this type of political system

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to be a “liberalized autocracy,” which he defines as “a system of rule that allows for a measure of political openness and competition in the electoral, party, and press arenas, while ultimately ensuring that power rests in the hands of ruling regimes.” Brumberg’s definition of a liberalized autocracy includes the use of what I define as controlled democratization in the previous section. It quickly becomes clear that not allowing true democratization to occur is yet another way that Arab authoritarian regimes maintain their regime stability.

Table 1

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<th>Partial Autocracies</th>
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<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
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Brumberg separates Arab regimes into two major categories: total autocracies, and partial autocracies. Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Iraq under Saddam Hussein’s rule are all total autocracies, while Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, the Palestinian Territories, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates can be considered to be partial autocracies. Total autocracies all have oil money (although it is worth noting that there are some partial autocracies that also have significant oil income). All of these

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states base the foundation of their legitimacy on a linked set of ideas: that the state has the mission of defending the Arab or Islamic world; its institutions should control everything; and very large security agencies are therefore necessary to defend them.

Partial autocracies have a certain degree of openness, but this openness is controlled by the regime. There is some separation between the state and society that allows for a small amount of competitive politics, but the state still maintains control over how competitive politics are allowed to become. Additionally, the state has enough economic development that it does not need to be obsessed with any single resource, interest, or class. Finally, rulers play an important role in the state’s religious institutions.34

All of these regimes, both total and partial autocracies, use a number of systems to maintain their regime stability. Some of them, described by Quinlivan, have already been mentioned. For example, Saudi Arabia, is able to maintain its regime stability in large part because of its massive oil reserves. Saudi Arabia has the world’s largest amount of proven oil reserves—roughly 267 billion barrels—almost 20 percent of the world’s proven oil reserves.35 The Saudi monarchy maintains complete control over the country’s government and society. Before the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia allowed very little openness in its civil society, and very limited involvement of the citizens in the election of government officials. Saudi’s strong economy allows the government to maintain complete control over the country, often in repressive ways. It does this by using a strong internal security service, which keeps track of political dissidents, and arrests anyone it

34 “Democratization in the Arab World? The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy,” pp. 61-63.
feels is a threat to the regime. Additionally, Saudi Arabia takes advantage of its important role as an oil producer in order to maintain support from Western countries, despite its repressive policies towards its people.

Another important aspect of a full autocracy’s ability to maintain its regime stability is the use of patrimonialism. In Saudi, members of the royal family hold key positions throughout the government. This is particularly true in the military, where members of the royal family are promoted based on trust rather than merit. Additionally, Saudi Arabia, along with Jordan, relies heavily on tribal and Bedouin loyalties to maintain power and control over the military.

Partial autocracies use similar techniques to full autocracies, but tend to be less oppressive and allow for more liberalization and openness in the political system. For example, Egypt, which has elections, has an extremely powerful coercive capability that gives the state complete control over civil society. As a result of this control, opposition groups have been reluctant to mobilize and pose a serious political threat to the regime. Unlike Saudi Arabia, Egypt’s military is highly institutionalized. Because Egypt’s president Hosni Mubarak has the ultimate authority (this is also the case in many monarchies, like Morocco, for example), there is no clear separation of powers, enabling the regime to maintain its complete control. This gives the ruler the ability to place constitutionally mandated restraints on political parties and the parliament, limiting the ability for elected officials to truly be representative of the population while at the same time ensuring that elected officials do not present a real threat to the regime. Even though

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Egypt has elections for president, Mubarak rules like a King in Egypt—his reelection is virtually guaranteed with each new election. Mubarak took office in 1981 following the assassination of Anwar Sadat by Islamist radicals. Soon thereafter Mubarak began fighting Islamist extremists in Egypt to eliminate the threat that took down Sadat. He declared a state of emergency in Egypt, which has remained in effect ever since. The state of emergency gives police additional powers, suspends certain constitutional rights, legalizes censorship, and makes any political activity that is not government-approved illegal. Tamara Cofman Wittes argues that Mubarak has created an extremely stable regime, and that his political party, the National Democratic Party, is so dominant that it is not clear when it might ever lose its majority. Mubarak has also placed his son in a position of power within the political party, and also in a position to succeed Mubarak.

Support from the United States and other Western countries also helps Arab autocracies to maintain their regime stability. Many Arab states play an important role for Western countries, particularly the United States, which send hundreds of millions of dollars in economic aid and billions in military aid every year. F. Gregory Gause argues that one of the reasons that regimes have remained stable in the Middle East is in part because of this outside intervention and the pressure that can come along with it.

39 "Hosni Mubarak: Elections or No, He's Still Pharoah."
40 The FY2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act provides $200 million in Economic Support Fund (ESF) assistance and $1.3 billion in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) assistance to Egypt.
“Outside powers have consistently supported, at times with military force, the regional status quo,” he writes in his article “Sovereignty, Statecraft and Stability in the Middle East.” Western states have intervened militarily many times since World War II to protect the stability of Arab authoritarian regimes. The U.S. sent troops to Lebanon in the late 60s to counter the threat from Nasser; the U.S. air force was deployed in Saudi Arabia for part of the Yemen Civil War to offer protection from the Egyptian threat; American troops again went to Lebanon in 1982 to help restore stability after Israeli and Syrian troops withdrew; and in the first Gulf War the United States sent more than 500,000 troops and led coalition forces to stop Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.

As we will see in the case study of the Arab Spring, Arab authoritarian regimes used democratization as yet another tool to help maintain their regime stability. Rather than allowing democratization to occur naturally where it might threaten stability, regimes instead control democratization so that it can be used to protect and ensure their rule and even to strengthen their hold on power. Additionally, the role that external powers can play in democratization also has serious policy implications for the United States.

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42 Ibid, pp. 455-456.
CASE STUDY: THE ARAB SPRING

I will analyze the Arab Spring by grouping countries into the categories of total autocracy and partial autocracy, as detailed in the Regime Stability and the Middle East section. By applying the measurements of democratization as well as the measurements for controlled democratization, I will be examine the events of the Arab Spring, and determine when democratization was naturally occurring or controlled by the regime.

**Total Autocracies**

Saudi Arabia held its first nationwide municipal elections from January through April of 2005. Candidates campaigned on a variety of issues including political reform, corruption, unemployment, and increasing public services for citizens. However, women were not allowed to vote, despite the fact that Saudi law states that citizens over 21, except military personnel, who have lived in the region for more than one year before election day are eligible to vote. Only roughly 25 percent of the eligible population was registered to vote prior to the elections. Ultimately, the monarchy in Saudi Arabia maintains complete control over the country, including control over the electoral process. Those who seek reform are often jailed, or face travel restrictions or other punishment from the government. Saudi law does not give citizens the right to freedom of expression, and Saudis are not allowed to organize formally without permission from the government.

In addition to the municipal elections, Saudi Arabia has a 150 member Consultative Council that is exclusively male with members appointed by the King. In 2004 three women were appointed to serve on an advisory council to the Consultative Council, but not as full members. The King and provincial governors also hold a weekly forum where citizens are able to petition on a variety of issues. Women are not usually allowed to attend, and must send a written petition on their behalf. Ultimately, the municipal elections in 2004, while important for their significance, did not actually result in any reform because the positions that were up for election did not hold any real power or significance.

Using Doorenspleet’s two components of a minimal democracy, the presence of competition and universal suffrage, Saudi Arabia progressed towards becoming a democracy by allowing more open elections (although not at the national level), but did not do so through the use of universal suffrage. The electoral reforms undertaken by Saudi Arabia during this period clearly fall under Schedler’s definition of electoral authoritarianism. The regime reserves key positions, like those on the Consultative Council, for political appointment, only allowing male citizens to vote in local municipal elections. Although citizens were permitted to vote in municipal elections, the heads of Saudi Arabia’s 13 provinces are princes or persons close to the royal family. Political parties are not allowed to exist, forcing opposition groups to organize outside of the

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Saudi Arabia also tries to limit the freedom of speech of these groups, and it does not allow any opposition candidates to participate in elections. The government is also able to control democratization by disenfranchising large groups of the population, including women and men who serve in the military. Saudi Arabia does not permit male members of the military to vote as a way of de-politicizing the military—this can help to limit the possibility of a military coup that might threaten the regime’s stability.

Saudi Arabia is representative of the ways that total autocracies maintain their monopoly on power, even when allowing for some controlled democratization. The Monarchy does not allow for elections at the national level, ensures that those who are in positions of power are appointed members of the royal family or closely tied to it, and limits the voice of any individuals or groups that could potentially threaten the regime, like opposition parties and members of the military. Similar types of control are also seen in partial autocracies, although these regimes often exert less control over democratization, but still maintain the ability to stop reforms from becoming a serious threat to their survival.

**Partial Autocracies**

The beginnings of the Arab Spring can be seen as early as October 2002 when Bahrain held its first legislative elections in 29 years. In December 2002 Bahrain convened its parliament for the first time since 1975 after ratifying a new constitution that provides for many individual rights including regular elections and independence for the

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47 *Background Note: Saudi Arabia.*
judiciary. According to the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), 243,449 voters were registered, more than 50 percent of the population participated in the first round of the elections and over 40 percent participated in the second round of elections.\textsuperscript{48} This was an important event in Bahrain, a country with a Shiite majority that is ruled by a Sunni monarchy. However, many Shiites were not happy with the process and they boycotted the elections, which they considered to be only partly competitive because of the King’s rules. Among the political groups boycotting the elections were the main Shiite political party and the main liberal intellectual party.\textsuperscript{49} According to NDI’s analysis, a large amount of Sunni voters participated in the elections, but the boycotting groups seem to have succeeded in drawing Shiite voters away from the elections.\textsuperscript{50} Islamists won 19 seats, secularists won 18 seats, and independents won three seats.\textsuperscript{51}

The 2002 elections in Bahrain help demonstrate the difference between democratization in total and partial autocracies. Bahrain allowed women and men to vote, and the elections were held at the national level. However, the legitimacy of the election was called into question by some Bahrainis, particularly Shiite citizens, because prior to the elections the King released a constitution developed without consultation of the main political societies.\textsuperscript{52} National elections were a step in the right direction. However, because Bahrain has an upper and lower house of parliament, with members of the upper

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
house appointed by the King, the Monarchy maintains control over reforms. As long as
the upper house of parliament maintains the power, the lower house and municipal
councils have limited power. This helps to maintain the King’s power, as well as the
continued dominance of Bahrain’s Sunni minority.

The elections in Bahrain and convening of its parliament in late 2002 served as a
precursor to the Arab Spring. But it wasn’t until 2004, when a series of elections began
taking place across the region, that scholars of the Middle East began to take note of the
liberalizing trend in the region. The first major event took place in April 2004, when
Algeria reelected President Abdelaziz Bouteflika with balloting that met European Union
standards. The elections represented a major step forward from the 1999 elections, which
were criticized after six of the seven presidential candidates withdrew the day before the
election, leaving only Bouteflika, who was backed by the military, as the remaining
candidate. The other candidates withdrew because they did not want to legitimate an
election where the end result was predetermined by the military. However, the April 2004
elections were not without their own problems. President Bouteflika had a substantial
advantage over his opponents as a result of his control over state resources, and complete
control over the state-run media in the period leading up to the election. Testimony
before the House of Representatives Committee on International Relations by NDI’s
Leslie Campbell, Senior Associate and Regional Director for the Middle East and North
Africa, noted that there were “credible allegations of manipulation of the justice system
and administrative interference by the president’s campaign” from several of the other
presidential candidates.\textsuperscript{53} Bouteflika won the elections with 85 percent of the vote. Approximately 58 percent of registered voters participated in the elections.\textsuperscript{54}

The elections were a major step towards a transparent and open electoral process, but there were still significant problems. The elections share the characteristics of several of Schedler’s measurements of electoral authoritarianism, in particular his third measurement—authoritarian rulers using their power to prevent opposition parties from campaigning freely. Because Bouteflika controlled Algeria’s state-run television and radio, he was able to prevent opposition candidates from effectively and freely campaigning by ensuring that he received positive coverage. According to the U.S. Department of State’s 2004 Human Rights Report on Algeria, during the three-week official campaign period before the elections, all Presidential candidates received equal amounts of time on radio and television, but prior to this period opposition candidates were generally blocked from gaining access to public radio and television.\textsuperscript{55} Three of the candidates also complained that they were unfairly prevented from participating in the elections. The Constitutional Council, which determines whether candidates have met all of the requirements to participate in the elections, ruled that three candidates did not receive enough signatures for their names to be placed on the ballot. Two of these

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
candidates claimed that their invalidation by the Council was politically motivated, but were unable to provide evidence. Other candidates argued that there had been tampering with voter lists.\textsuperscript{56}

In September 2004 Qatar created a constitution that gave new political rights to Qataris and established a 45-seat Consultative Assembly, two-thirds of which is open to direct election by the people. The constitution also guarantees freedom of assembly, expression, and religion to Qataris, and also formally gives women equality. Although the creation of a constitution and a partially elected advisory body represents a major step forward for Qatar, more than 75 percent of Qatar’s population is made up of non-citizens who do not have any representation in the government. These foreign workers are mostly from South Asia and other Arab countries.\textsuperscript{57} These foreign workers do not receive the rights and benefits that Qatari citizens receive, including education and health care. Additionally, political parties are illegal, and although the new constitution guarantees freedom of assembly, this right is still very restricted. And although the 2004 constitution granted women formal equality, in actuality there are few protections for Qatari women. There are no laws against domestic violence, no protections against discrimination, as well as general restrictions on women’s freedom of movement.\textsuperscript{58}

Qatar took major steps forward towards democracy by allowing national elections, and equality to all Qatari citizens. However, elections for the 30 members open to election by the people have not yet occurred. So far Qatar has only had municipal

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
elections, although they cover the entire emirate. Additionally, the municipal council does not hold any real political power, and only addresses local issues like “street repair, green space and public works projects.” The Emir continues to have full executive power and elected authorities do not have any real power. Political parties or any organizations that are critical of the government are forbidden. Despite advances on the surface towards democracy, Qatar’s reforms during the Arab Spring clearly fall under Schedler’s definition of controlled democratization.

In May 2005 Kuwait’s parliament voted to give women the right to vote and to stand in parliamentary and local elections. No women won seats in parliament until elections held in May 2009 after the Emir dissolved parliament, which was mostly made up of opposition members. Kuwait is more progressive than many of its neighbors in the Gulf and its parliament tends to be more active than other Gulf parliaments as well. Kuwait has a freer press, and women make up more than 40 percent of the Kuwaiti labor force as of 2006. More than 80 percent of the Kuwaiti labor force works for the government, while the majority of the non-Kuwaiti labor force works for the private sector. Despite allowing for more debate in its parliament, and generally more openness in its society, the Kuwaiti Emir still maintains the ability to exercise complete authority over parliament. When parliament raises serious questions regarding corruption, or other major issues with the ruling regime, the Emir simply chooses to suspend, or dissolve

61 Ibid.
parliament if he is unable to first co-opt members of parliament, or play opposing groups off of one another. In May 2006, on the tail end of the Arab Spring, the Emir did just this, following a dispute between the government and opposition members of the parliament over reducing the number of electoral districts.  

Kuwait also clearly practices electoral authoritarianism, and does now allow democratization to proceed naturally. Kuwait’s constitution gives the Emir the power to dissolve the National Assembly by decree. As Schedler argues, allowing citizens to vote for political positions that do not have real authority is one way that regimes control democratization. Whenever the Emir does not like reforms enacted by parliament, he dissolves parliament, and calls for new elections. The government has also been accused of electoral fraud, specifically, of buying votes during the July 2003 parliamentary elections. Kuwait, like several other Arab countries, also forbids members of the armed forces or other uniformed servicemen from voting. Additionally, one must be a Kuwaiti citizen for at least 20 years in order to vote and seek election. This is another way of disenfranchising parts of the population. The Emir’s ability to dissolve parliament at his will, however, gives him ultimate control over reform in Kuwait. Once again, giving citizens the right to vote for elected officials is merely a way to legitimate the government’s rule and quiet reformers.

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64 Ibid.
The Arab Spring continued to grow with the February 2005 announcement by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak calling for an amendment to Article 76 of Egypt’s constitution, which would permit multiparty presidential elections. This announcement came after four previous elections where Mubarak’s victory was all but guaranteed. The constitutional amendment was approved in May 2005, but by then Mubarak’s opponents were already claiming that the changes were nothing more than an attempt to deflect external pressure for reform while at the same time guaranteeing Mubarak’s re-election.

During this period Egypt was under a great deal of external pressure from the United States. Much of this pressure came directly from President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. At one point, President Bush made a personal phone call to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak asking him to call for a freer press and independent monitoring of Egypt’s upcoming elections.\(^{65}\) Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice postponed a trip to Egypt that was to take place in late February because officials wanted to look at the progress Egypt had made on democratic change.\(^{66}\) President Bush also mentioned Egypt in his 2005 State of the Union address, calling on Egypt to “show the way toward democracy in the Middle East” as it had showed the way toward peace in the region.\(^{67}\)

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Mubarak publicly called for an amendment to Egypt’s constitution that would allow for multiparty presidential elections.

Although the requirements to run for president in Egypt are difficult to meet, according to Tamara Cofman Wittes, previously of the Brookings Institution, they do allow for some actual political competition. However, Wittes argues in an essay written before the elections that, “the short interval between the electoral changes and the election itself, along with the ruling party’s overwhelming dominance of politics, mean that Mubarak is likely to be re-elected easily and so will have up to six more years in which to shape the environment for his eventual successor.” As Wittes mentions, the newly changed requirements to participate in the 2005 presidential elections were difficult to meet. For the 2005 elections any legally recognized political party in Egypt could nominate a candidate to participate in the presidential elections. However, in future elections, any party that wants to submit a candidate must have to have been recognized for at least five years before the elections, and must hold at least five percent of the seats in parliament before the election. Before the 2005 presidential elections the largest opposition parties in the 454-seat parliament only had five seats each—if the five percent rule were in effect for those elections, neither of them would have been allowed to participate. Additionally, Mubarak all but ensured that independent candidates would not be able to participate in the 2005 elections by requiring that they receive signatures

69 Ibid.
from five percent of Egypt’s national and regional elected officials. At least 65 of those signatures have to come from members of the parliament, and at least 25 of the signatures must be from members of the Shura Council, Egypt’s upper house of parliament. Additionally, at least 140 signatures must be from members of local councils from Egypt’s 26 provinces.\textsuperscript{70} This would be a difficult feat for any independent candidate to achieve, since 95 percent of Egypt’s elected officials are members of Mubarak’s political party.

Mubarak’s call for multi-party elections can been seen as a major step for democratization in the Middle East. However, Mubarak was only practicing electoral authoritarianism. As Wittes writes in her article, “Hosni Mubarak: Elections or No, He’s Still Pharaoh,” his announcement:

\begin{quote}
…Is less a big shift in response to mounting internal and external pressures than a hard-nosed concession designed to strengthen and lengthen his waning days in office while he prepares the ground for his ruling party to carry on without him—possibly with his son at its helm.\textsuperscript{71}
\end{quote}

Not only did Mubarak limit the participation of opposition candidates with stringent requirements, as well as limit his opponents’ time to campaign by making the announcement a short period of time before the elections, he also is working to ensure his political legacy and the continuation of his pseudo-monarchy by placing his son in a position of power within his political party, the National Democratic Party (NDP). Mubarak denies that he is trying to create a political dynasty, but with his son running the

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{71} "Hosni Mubarak: Elections or No, He's Still Pharoah."
NDP’s central decision-making body, there is no one else in a position to take over the party upon Mubarak’s retirement except for his son.

The Arab Spring culminated with the so-called Cedar Revolution in Lebanon. The Cedar Revolution, nicknamed along with other political uprisings that occurred in the former Soviet Union, like the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, began after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on February 14, 2005. Following the assassination, which appeared to have been the result of a Syrian-supported operation, public demonstrations began calling for an end to Syria’s 30-year military occupation of Lebanon. These demonstrations also blamed Syria for Hariri’s assassination. By February 28, the pro-Syrian regime of Omar Karami, was forced to resign, and opposition members of Lebanon’s National Assembly also continued to call for a full Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. Less than a month after Hariri’s assassination, Bashar al-Assad announced that Syrian troops would withdraw from Lebanon over the next several months. The last Syrian troops left Lebanon by the end of April. New elections for the national assembly were held starting at the end of May 2005, and ultimately an anti-Syrian bloc led by Said Hariri named Tayyar al-Mustaqbal, the “Future Tide,” won 72 out of the 128 seats in Lebanon’s National Assembly. The Amal Party, which is Hezbollah’s political wing, won 35 seats.72

The Cedar Revolution appeared to be a democratic movement that would upset Syria’s balance of power and allow Lebanon to be governed without Syrian oversight. It

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did not have any of the aspects of Schedler’s electoral authoritarianism, and can be considered to be free and open democratization. However, the new government was weak, and divided, and it was unable to control Hezbollah. Additionally, Syria still maintains an influence as a result of the number of pro-Syrian politicians in the national assembly. Hezbollah is able to maintain its militia, which is considered to be as strong as the Lebanese army, because the Lebanese government is unable to control Hezbollah.\textsuperscript{73} Ultimately, Hezbollah’s presence in Lebanon, combined with the factionalism in the national assembly has prevented Lebanon from continuing to democratize and transition to a true democracy.

The January 2006 Palestinian elections marked the beginning of the end of the Arab Spring when Hamas defeated Fatah, winning a large majority of seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council. After an armed confrontation, Hamas emerged in control of Gaza, with Fatah maintaining control of the West Bank. The elections were considered free and open. In this case, free and fair democratic elections resulted in an Islamist political party coming to power. This presented a problem for the United States and Israel. Because Hamas was designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, it did not recognize the new Palestinian government as legitimate. The Bush Administration imposed sanctions against the new government and was open in its support for Mahmud Abbas over elected Hamas leader Ismail Haniyya. The United States in this situation actively attempted to work against a democratically elected political group. This reflects the potential problems that arise with American support for democratization—if free

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
elections result in political parties coming to power that the United States does not support, should the United States continue to support democratization or not? I will discuss the implications of this more in the Policy Implications section.

The democratization that occurred in Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories was more natural and less controlled than the democratization that occurred in other Arab states during the Arab Spring. But there is also another approach that is a kind of middle ground between controlled democratization and all-out open democratization. The Kingdom of Morocco has been undertaking gradual liberalization since King Mohammed VI came to power following his father’s death in 1999. Among his first reforms was to pay close attention to human rights. His father was criticized for his human rights violations, so Mohammad VI released a large number of political prisoners, including Abdessalam Yassin, the leader of Morocco’s largest Islamist party from jail. He also gave the country’s Human Rights Council additional powers, and brought Moroccan law more in line with international laws related to human rights.  

The King also oversaw the reform of the Mudawwana, Morocco’s family code, in 2004. The new changes raised the marriage age in Morocco from 15 to 18, gives women the right to divorce by mutual consent and limits the right of men to ask for divorce unilaterally. It also places restrictions on polygamy, and introduces the concept of joint responsibility in marriage.  

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74 Marina Ottaway and Meredith Riley, "Morocco: From Top-down Reform to Democratic Transition?," Carnegie Papers, no. 71 (September 2006): 7

75 Ibid, p. 8.
Mohammad VI appears to be focusing on liberalizing in social areas as a way to deflect attention from the general lack of political reform and democratization in Morocco. The King still maintains the ability to appoint the prime minister and a government without taking election results into account, as well as the ability to dissolve the government and to legislate power in the absence of a parliament. The King still practices many of the aspects of electoral authoritarianism Schedler describes. Mohammed VI is not pursuing political reform, but his social reforms have made Morocco far more liberal with respect to human rights and women’s rights than most Arab states. Brumberg argues that this liberalization is what makes Morocco an excellent candidate for transition to democracy, but it is not clear what it will take to put the country on this path.

Although there was a period of democratization during the Arab Spring, Arab governments always had control over the kinds of reforms they would undertake, as well as how extensive those reforms would be. They chose to implement economic and political reforms, but only as long as they would not undermine the regime’s authority. There was no actual redistribution of power or increase of power or influence for opposition movements, with the exception of in Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories. For example, Bahrain decided to allow partial election of one of its parliaments. This served to appease the criticism of some of the country’s Shiite majority, but did not undermine the overall power of the government. In situations where Islamist political parties made gains in elections, leaders stressed the dangers that these political parties posed, and in turn, clamped down on reform in their countries. At the same time, the
United States, which was supportive of the democratization that was occurring in the Middle East, also began to have doubts regarding democratization in the Arab Middle East—if it meant that Islamist groups would come to power. The United States did not consider that advocating for increased democratization in the Middle East could redistribute political power in such a way that the democracies that emerged might not be as friendly to America as existing regimes. Because some of the regimes, like Egypt for example, reformed as a result of American pressure, a let-up in that pressure would provide the regime with an additional reason to stop continuing democratization. As I will examine next, it is necessary for the United States to fully understand the implications of its democratization efforts in the Middle East before pursuing such a policy.
POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are important policy implications that Western states, in particular the United States, must consider when addressing democratization in the Middle East, as well as how Middle Eastern states maintain their regime stability. During the Arab Spring, the United States embarked upon a policy of democracy promotion in the Middle East, encouraging democratization to move forward. When democratization resulted in Islamist groups winning in elections held across the region, the United States backed off of encouraging democratization in the Middle East, instead preferring the continued rule of existing autocratic rulers to the potential emergence of democracies with Islamist rulers. Additionally, because George W. Bush’s administration argued that its intervention in Iraq was in the name of democracy promotion, United States-supported democratization efforts now have a negative connotation in the Middle East, and around the world.

It is also important to examine how democratization in the Middle East, and the United States’ support for democratization, is also influenced by growing concerns about Iran and its strategic plans in the region. Because the United States, just like Arab authoritarian regimes, feared Iran’s growing influence in the region, the United States opted to strengthen its relationships with authoritarian leaders in the region through the use of new military sales and assistance. This can be seen in new agreements formed with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, as well as other Gulf states. It is in the United States’ interest to work with these regimes, and to maintain their stability, to help counter the threat from Iran and maintain America’s interests in the Middle East.
The United States’ support for democratization during the Arab Spring came after decades of seeking to maintain the status quo. It was only after the attacks of September 11 that President Bush’s administration reexamined its policies towards the region, deciding to support democratization as part of its efforts to combat terrorism. This change in policy was supported by the argument that authoritarian regimes in the Middle East were responsible for the growth of Islamist extremism. By replacing these regimes with democratic regimes, the United States argued it would help to combat this extremism. But this represented a major change in policy from supporting the status quo in the region. In the past, the United States has argued that authoritarian regimes that support the United States will help America to fight terrorist groups and Islamist extremists. The United States believed it would help to increase its security by supporting continued stability in the Middle East.

The implications of a policy of encouraging democratization in the Middle East has important considerations for President Obama’s administration, which has abandoned, or at least shelved President George W. Bush’s democratization policies. An understanding of how Middle Eastern regimes have used democratization to maintain and strengthen their rule might have helped the Bush Administration to know the possible outcomes of pursuing such a policy. Understanding why democratization has not spread to the Middle East, and how regimes have instead used democratization as a tool to maintain their regime stability might cause an outside power to not pursue such a policy. Or if the United States remained intent on encouraging democratization in the Middle East, understanding the tactics that existing regimes use to maintain their stability could
help it to develop a policy to counteract these tactics and allow democratic challengers to make a stand.

What would a democratic Middle East actually mean for American interests in the region? In addition to understanding how the U.S. might better encourage democratization or understand why democratization has not yet occurred in the Middle East, it is also important to fully consider how democracy in the Middle East might impact American foreign policy. First, it is necessary for American policy makers to recognize that just because a state is a democracy does not mean it will continue to have a friendly relationship with the United States. Chris Zambelis aptly notes that “…until only recently, US ties with India, the world’s most populous democracy, were marked by tensions and rivalry.” 76 Transitioning democracies are also often unstable and can suffer from setbacks and other problems that can affect security. Additionally, just because a state is a democracy does not mean that the problem of terrorism will be eliminated. Examples of this can easily be seen in Germany, Ireland, and Spain.

Another issue that comes with American-supported democratization is that of credibility. Certainly after the Arab Spring the United States has a serious credibility issue when it comes to its democratization policies. However, during the Arab Spring American initiatives in the region to support democratization were met with a lot of push back from Arab regimes. There are several reasons for this, all of which are important to consider before embarking on future democratization efforts in the region. The first is that the Arab Street was skeptical of the United States’ intentions given its long history of

76 Chris Zambelis, "The Strategic Implications of Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Middle East," Parameters, Autumn 2005: 89.
supporting Arab authoritarian regimes. Many Arabs believe that the United States’ support of human rights and self-determination in Arab countries is “disingenuous” considering Israel’s occupation in the Palestinian territories and its continued expansion of settlements. \(^77\) Arabs and Muslims also were troubled by America’s intervention in Iraq, and saw it as proof that the United States will use forces against Arabs and Muslims if it is in their strategic interest to do so. \(^78\)

When the United States announced its Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) in 2003 and the Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) in 2004, many Arab leaders across the region opposed the plans. MEPI was established to encourage development of civil society and rule of law in the Middle East. It has given more than $530 million to more than 550 projects in 17 countries in the Middle East since its founding. \(^79\) GMEI was another regional initiative supported by the United States. It was adopted by the G-8 in June 2004, and was based on the idea of making a long-term commitment to the process of reform in the region. This would be accomplished by holding a regular forum to discuss reforms, starting a democracy assistance group to sponsor non-governmental programs to build democracy, a creating a foundation for democracy modeled on the National Endowment for Democracy but focused on the Middle East. \(^80\) Statements by Arab officials regarding these initiatives reflect the credibility issue the United States had

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\(^77\) Ibid, p. 92.
\(^78\) Ibid.
in the Arab world. In response to GMEI, Hosni Mubarak stated that “imposing a certain model of reform on Arab and Islamic states from the outside is unacceptable.” Echoing this, a joint statement from Egypt and Saudi Arabia stated that the Arab world “is progressing on the road to development, modernization and reform, but in a way that is compatible with the needs, interests, values, and identities of their peoples.” Ultimately, GMEI was scaled down to a plan called the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENAI). As we have seen in our examination of the Arab Spring, the reforms that occurred did not really change the status quo in the Arab World, and Arab reformers saw the United States’ praise for the reforms that Arab regimes enacted as proof that the United States was not serious about real reform in the region.

Ultimately, the United States needs to eliminate the inconsistencies in its democracy promotion if it truly wants to aide in the development of new democracies in the Middle East and around the world. It seems that America’s power interests in the region will always get in the way of the United States’ desire to spread democracy. There are implications to this hypocrisy, but if President Obama’s administration instead opts to pressure Arab regimes to liberalize rather than democratize, there is less of a chance that this liberalization will immediately threaten regime stability. For example, if the United States instead focused on liberalization, pressuring Arab regimes to reduce human rights violations, encouraging the establishment of independent electoral commissions, and creating processes by which political parties can become legalized, these countries will

82 Ibid.
83 Zambelis, p. 93.
develop stronger civil society and stronger state institutions. This might eventually increase the chances for more democratic elections whose outcomes are not pre-determined by the ruling regime. In the mean time, these types of reforms will help these countries maintain their political well being by reducing calls for increased openness from opposition groups, and will also not threaten America’s security interests in the region.
CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the democratization that occurred in Arab authoritarian countries during the Arab Spring was for the most part, electoral authoritarianism and not naturally occurring democratization. When implementing reforms, Arab authoritarian leaders maintained control over democratization and the extent to which it threatened their stability. Regimes did not allow democratization to continue to the point that it threatened their stability by creating a façade of democratization—on the surface it appeared as if a transition to democracy was possible, but in reality this was not the case.

The Arab Spring represented a period of great hope in the West that the third wave of democratization was finally spreading into the Middle East. However, upon examining the events of the Arab Spring, it quickly becomes clear that with the exception of Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, the democratization that occurred during the rest of the Arab Spring was always controlled by the ruling regime. Even though these reforms were controlled, it is important to note that the increased openness of elections is a good thing for the people of these authoritarian regimes. However, it is important to observe when democratization comes about as a result of public will, and when it occurs as a result of actions taken by the regime for the purpose of protecting the regime. This awareness can give an observer an indication over whether the democratization is naturally occurring, or is being controlled by the regime.

So this all begs the question: Will democratization lead to the establishment of a true democracy in the Middle East? Just how strong of a hold do authoritarian regimes
have over their stability—how far can they take democratization before they truly risk losing control of their regime? Daniel Brumberg accurately forecasted that the lack of free elections in the Middle East has created circumstances where free elections could actually result in the election of illiberal Islamists rather than democrats (secular or Islamist).  

The solution appears to lie in a gradual progression into democratization, by first investing in liberalization. This can be done by encouraging the development of civil society through effective political parties, a truly independent judicial system, and then leading into fair, free, internationally observed elections, and legislative bodies that are truly representative of the population. Additionally, regimes that encourage a more competitive political process will be able to be more confident that Islamist groups will be limited by the participation of other political parties, and also that Islamists will be willing to be accommodating in return for participation in the system. States that instead only permit political parties that are in line with the ruling regime will only encourage Islamist groups to be more radical and against the ruling regime. Having political liberalization can begin to create a more open environment while at the same time not directly threatening the regime’s stability.

Partial autocracies seem to be in a better position to eventually have peaceful transitions to democracy than the total autocracies. This cannot be done through civil society building alone, but must be accompanied by the type of liberalized political society described above. It is not surprising that most Arab regimes will not want to move

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84 “The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy,” p. 57.
beyond political liberalization into true, democratization because of the risk that the
regime’s stability will be lessened, and the regime will fall. Brumberg argues that the
Arab regime that is perhaps most likely to eventually head in the direction of true
democratization is Morocco. Because Morocco’s two largest secular political parties, as
well as several other smaller parties, have enough public support to offset the Islamist
parties, it would not be possible for an Islamist party to gain power except in a multi-
party coalition. Additionally, the Moroccan king is not part of a political party, giving
him the ability to “serve as an arbiter who brokers compromises over social, cultural,
legal and economic policy.” As we have already seen, the King has already been
embarking on a plan of increased liberalization in Morocco, but only to the extent that it
does not threaten his authority.

In the long run it is not clear if or when an Arab authoritarian regime may attempt
to allow true democratization to occur. It seems that as long as the current structure
remains in place most of the partial autocracies will maintain the existing balance
between the regime and civil society—political parties will not be able to participate
freely and parliaments will continue to lack any true authority. As long as no one political
party gains a preponderance of power, there will be nothing to rock the boat, and the
status quo will continue. In full autocracies, true democratization seems even less likely
to occur. Regardless, having a proper understanding of how Arab authoritarian regimes
maintain their regime stability through controlled democratization is necessary for any
Western power, particularly the United States, that has ambitions of encouraging

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successful democratization in the Middle East while still maintaining their security interests in the region.
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