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Democratisation, religious extremism, fragile states, and insurgencies: Bush's legacies to Obama and the challenges ahead

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The administration of George W. Bush pursued an announced policy of democratization in the Greater Middle East. In that era, Washington initiated, or presided over the initiation of, three democratic transitions in the Middle East: in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine. It also sought to pressure Egypt to adopt more open democratic procedures. By "democracy," Bush appears to have meant no more Schumpeterian process wherein there are regular free elections in which the public chooses its leaders, in which there are winners and losers and in which the losers depart.[1] This criterion is therefore a good one whereby to judge the outcomes, even though it has been argued by clinics that the definition is thin in leaving out institutions and ideals such as the rule of law that must underpin genuine democracies. Bush's policies in this regard were referred to as "muscular Wilsonianism," and were articulated by administration spokesmen within the framework of his "war on terror." None of the transitions attempted could be

called a success, and it could be argued that in important regards all failed. In contrast, two years into the administration of his successor, Barack Obama, many Arab countries witnessed grassroots movements for democracy that, in the cases of Egypt and Tunisia, seem likely to have some success. Why did Bush's initiatives fail?

Bush left the legacy of fragile or failed democratic transitions to Barack Obama. The Obama administration, largely adopting a pragamatic or perhaps defensive-Realist foreign policy, tried to pursue pragmatic policies but was stymied by disputed elections, religious extremism and hastily or badly drafted constitutions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Its cautious realism, ironically enough, in some ways came into conflict with the idealism of the youth, women's and workers' movements that broke out in winter-spring 2010-2011. Obama came into office attempting to implement strong policies (withdrawal from Iraq, counter-insurgency in Afghanistan, a two-state solution in Palestine and Israel) with weak, deeply divided and often authoritarian partners whose rise was engineered or accidentally fostered by his predecessor.

The mantra of democratization under Bush strangely mixed pragmatic policy considerations with an idealistic rhetoric. The Neoconservatives in particular argued that authoritarian governance contributed to the rise of Muslim fundamentalist terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda, and that a democratizing Middle East would produce more eufunctional societies.[2] They often implied, without explicitly saying so, that the authoritarian states were more likely to scapegoat Israel, and so to foment anti-Semitism and anti-Israel terrorism, than would be democratically elected regimes that had less need to take the minds of the public off their lack of popular sovereignty. A further subtext of the discourse about democratization concerned economic liberalization. Deputy Secretary of

Defense Paul Wolfowitz is said to have characterized regimes such as Baathist Iraq and Syria as "Soviet surrogate states" and to have argued in the 1990s that the US had a window of only five to ten years as the sole superpower to put an end to them before challengers such as China arose that might limit US freedom of action.[3] These theorists appeared to have earlier hoped that after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Middle East would take the same path as Poland and what became the Czech Republic in Eastern Europe, turning toward democratic, multi-party politics and neoliberal economic policies. When that development did not occur, they appear to have decided that the sort of changes that rolled through Eastern Europe in the 1990s could be provoked by external, US intervention. Democratization by military intervention or diplomatic shaming and strong-arming, then, was intended to produce a series of velvet revolutions in the Middle East that would strengthen the US and Israeli diplomatic, military and economic position in this energy- and resource-rich region.

Important contradictions in US policy should be noted, especially the inconsistent application of muscular Wilsonianism. Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Jordan, Tunisia, and the Gulf oil states, among others, were largely exempted from Bush's pressure in this direction. All were characterized by deeply pro-American authoritarian regimes that lended their facilities and security forces to support for the "war on terror." They either had a peace treaty with Israel (Jordan) or practically speaking had an entente with it. In contrast, pre-invasion Iraq and Afghanistan were both anti-American and anti-Israel. Egypt looks more like the regimes that were exempted from pressure for democratization, having a peace treaty with Israel and good relations with the United States, and but as a regional opinion leader it was important for the Bush administration that it be pressured to fall in line with the policy. The 2006 elections in the Palestine Authority had long

been scheduled, and so were not a Bush administration initiative, but the administration did attempt at first to fit them into its over-arching narrative of democratization.

Democratic transitions have often succeeded in the past four decades. Spain, South Korea, Taiwan, Poland, Brazil, and many other examples could be cited. On the other hand, the democracy protesters at Tiananmen Square in China (1989) and those in Burma (1990) were crushed. Algeria's brief experiment with open elections was ended by its military in 1991-92 when the Muslim fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Party won.[4] Guillermo O'Donnell's and Philip P. Schmitter's classic theory of democratic transitions argues that when significant political change looms, four broad groups can usually be discerned— regime loyalists or hard liners, regime reformers or soft liners, a moderate opposition, and a radical opposition.[5] If the hard liners and soft liners remain committed to the regime, often they can block a transition. But if the soft liners ally with moderate oppositionists, one can get a relatively smooth transition to democracy. A victorious alignment of radicals with moderate oppositionists creates a more stark revolutionary change that can sweep away the old regime entirely. One problem with this four-fold typology of social forces, however, is that it assumes that each of the four has roughly equal weight. But among regime elements, surely the military is the most important. Mark Katz, drawing on the work of Crane Brinton, sees the question of whether the military supports the move to democratization as a key variable in explaining success or failure. Other variables must also be considered. One does not need higher math to see that the smoothest and most successful such transitions have occurred in wealthier countries. Adam Przeworski argues that increased gross national product does not predict whether or not a country will begin a transition to democracy—such transitions begin for many

possible reasons and are somewhat arbitrary. But they argue that a country's level of income is highly correlated with whether or not the transition to democracy succeeds, with poorer countries more often failing.[6]

My argument here will set aside the question of the most salient reasons for which the Bush administration invaded Afghanistan and Iraq or pressed for a Palestinian state. Nor will I consider the issue of whether the democratization program was sincere or cynical. That is, my object of inquiry is not the motives or decision-making of Washington but rather the shape and the aftermath of its policies in the Middle East. The question I will pose is the degree to which the transitions to democracy succeeded in each of the four Bush initiatives, and the reasons for success or failure in each. I will then turn to the reasons for which popular movements accomplished what Bush could not.

Let us take the least complicated Bush policy first, that toward Egypt. Although Egyptian reform played a relatively minor role in Bush administration policy, the 2005 presidential elections and the 2005 elections for Egypt's lower house provoked substantial turbulence in Bush's relationship with President Hosni Mubarak. Under Bush administration pressure, Mubarak had parliament amend the constitution with regard to the selection of the president, which had earlier been carried out by a vote of parliament and then a popular referendum ratifying parliament's choice. The new procedure allowed for multiparty popular elections for president. In June of 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice came to Cairo and called for the elections to be free and open, risking harming relations with Mubarak. Mubarak, who won a crushing victory, was later accused of using state resources to bus supporters to the polls. One of his opponents, Ayman Nur, appears to have been let out of jail briefly only for appearances sake, such as the

appearances were. After the elections, in which he was permitted to gain over 7 percent of the vote, he was summarily returned to prison on trumped-up charges.[7]

The later that fall Egypt held elections for the lower house of parliament. The Muslim Brotherhood, which had held 17 seats, increased its bloc to 88.[8] The Brotherhood is not allowed to run under its own banner, since purely religious parties are banned in Egypt. Other small parties are often willing to run Brotherhood candidates, however, if they think they can win in a particular constituency. Elections in Mubarak's Egypt were more a symbolic public ritual reaffirming state power than voters' choice of legitimate representatives, and bussed crowds, vote-buying, ballot fraud, and police coercion and interference in the vote counting are widely alleged to have been integral parts of the process.[9] For the Brotherhood to improve its performance so dramatically under such circumstances raised questions of whether the state did not allow them to do so in order to send a message to Washington that pressure for democratization would backfire. If so, the ploy was successful, since Bush's muscular Wilsonianism was never again trained on Cairo in a public way in succeeding years, nor did the succeeding Obama administration make fair elections in Egypt a priority until the people themselves pitched the issue in late January, 2011.

The failure of Bush's pressure on Egypt to open up and initiate a genuine democratic transition derived from some key weaknesses in the policy. Bush needed Egyptian logistical and political support for his Iraq war, and so could hardly press the Mubarak regime too ferociously on this issue. Although it is true that the US gives Egypt $1.5 billion a year in aid, half of it civilian and half military, this aid could not be used as a carrot for democratization. First of all, the aid for the most part actually goes to American corporations, which in turn provide made goods or military weaponry to Egypt, and cutting it off would hurt US

concerns. Second, the aid is an ongoing bribe to Egypt to remain at peace with Israel, and it is a little unlikely that Congress would have been willing to jeopardize Israel's security for the sake of pressuring Egypt with the threat of an aid cut-off. Other than this strategic rent, the United States, had few significant assets in Egypt, whether political, diplomatic or military, and so had little leverage other than mere hectoring by Dr. Rice. Although Mubarak did permit multi-party presidential elections, few observers believe that the election was free and fair, and neither Washington's pressure nor internal activism by the middle class Ghad or Tomorrow Party and the Kifaya or "Enough!" movement was sufficiently strong to challenge the hold on power of Egypt's soft military dictatorship. Despite some grumblings in the officer corps about plans for Hosni Mubarak to be succeeded by his son Gamal, a civilian, the military was at that time still backing the elder Mubarak, a former Air Marshall and war hero who was made vice president by Anwar El Sadat in part for that reason. The Egyptian security police ("Amn al-Dawlah") and military, firmly in control of the country, was deeply unsympathetic to the move toward political openness being urged by Bush and Rice, and they intervened to halt it. Fear that the most organized opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, might come to power and conduct a thorough revolution against the old order made it difficult for regime soft liners to ally with the opposition, and induced caution about significant change in all the actors, including Washington.[10] The "safety valve" obtained by the regime from having some 3 million workers abroad (out of a work force of about 25 million), and the dependence of the middle class on government and government-related jobs, all militated against a successful opening in the Bush period. That the opening was being forced from the outside probably also detracted from its legitimacy.

In contrast to Egypt, the Bush administration conquered and administered Afghanistan and Iraq and was central to the formation of new regimes in both countries. There is no mystery as to why Afghanistan's democratic transition has been troubled and may well have, as of the fraudulent parliamentary elections of September, 2010, failed altogether. Afghanistan is among the least suitable candidates for a successful transition to democracy in the world, just on the face of it.[11] Its nominal annual per capita income is only about $500. It is riven with ethnic grievances, having Sunni Tajiks, Sunni Pathans, Shiite Hazaras, Sunni Uzbeks and even Ismailis. Although ethnic diversity in and of itself may not impede democratic transition, a history of ethnically-based grievances or of regime preferentialism toward one of the ethnicities has often been an obstacle to smooth democratization. There is also the problem in ethnically divided societies of "over-bidding," wherein rival parties within an ethnic group attempt to out-do one another in representing its interests versus out-groups.[12] Afghanistan has been torn by war since the late 1970s. A history of violence and ethnic grievances plagued the country, against the pro-Soviet Tajiks by both Tajik and Pashtuns, among the Mujahidin themselves after they came to power in 1992, between them and the largely Pashtun Taliban from 1994, and then between Pasthun guerrillas and US and NATO forces and their ally, the new Afghanistan National Army, after 2001. The wars of the 1980s and 1990s were extremely disruptive. They displaced 3 million, mostly Pashtuns, to refugee camps in Pakistan. Two million mostly Tajik Persian speakers fled to Iran. Two million were displaced internally. At least a million were killed in the fighting, and probably 3 million wounded. Large numbers of widows, orphans, and abandoned families strove to survive, inside the country or in camps abroad. The mass displacements, killings and woundings of 11 million persons over these decades is an astonishing statistic

given that the population of the country in the 1980s may have been as small as 16 million (it is now estimated at 34 million). The age of mass displacement and killing was followed by the Taliban regime, which imposed a rigid and sectarian form of Islam on the country, immuring its women and sometimes massacring its Shiite minority.[13]

Afghanistan is not a society easy to mobilize for mass politics. Some 75 percent of the population is rural, and as many as 10 percent are still pastoral nomads. There are no powerful unions or chambers of commerce. There are not even enough police to do routine policing. Urban institutions are overwhelmed by the rapid influx of workers fleeing the insecurity of the countryside. The Karzai regime ensconced in Kabul, initially by the US via the international Bonn Process in late 2001, and reinforced by subsequent elections, has never allowed political parties to be founded and to engage in organizing and canvassing, so that elections are held on a non-party basis. The most organized institutions in the country are kinship groups (tribes and clans), guerrilla groups such as the Taliban and the Hizb-i Islami, and poppy growers and smugglers whose activities account for a third of the gross national product. The heavy dependence of an economy on a single high-priced commodity is a predictor of social violence, which is in turn a predictor of low rates of success in democratic transitions. Afghanistan's poppies and heroin are a continual source of conflict and destabilization, fuelling feuds and narco-terrorism.

In addition to these local, social problems that make democratization in Afghanistan an almost fairy tale endeavor, the history of the American and NATO occupation of the country since 2003 is replete with further difficulties. The American use of air power to fight the small remaining insurgency, in the course of which many innocent villagers were accidentally slaughtered, appears to have

alienated ever more Pashtuns from the foreign troops. The decision to garrison Afghanistan with large foreign troop contingents provoked nationalist opposition in some areas of the country, especially Pashtun provinces such as Qandahar, Helmand, Khost, Paktika, Ghazni, Nuristan and so forth. The Karzai government suffered from being seen as a puppet of white Christian foreign patrons. Karzai proved an obsessive micro-manager of affairs in Kabul and altogether unconcerned with governing the rest of the country (he is said to control only about a third of it). He and his brothers became known as the Karzai gang, for the questionable activities of some of the brothers, accused of financial corruption or involvement in the drug trade, a reputation that further hurt his legitimacy.

Karzai acted high-handedly during the August, 2009, presidential elections, which were marked by widespread fraud.[14] By mid-September, his leading opponent, Abdallah Abdallah, was charging Karzai with using state resources to engineer the stealing of the August 20 presidential election, and even accusing Karzai of treason. Abdullah said that Karzai bribed tribal elders between $4,000 and $8,000 each to throw the election to Karzai. Abdullah insisted on a run-off election, required only if no candidate receives at least 50 precent of the vote. Abdullah believed that the votes that put Karzai up to 54% were at least in part fraudulent and the result of vote-buying with state monies.[15]

There were two oversight bodies for the election, the inaccurately named Independent Election Commission, the members of which were appointed by Karzai, and the Electoral Complaints Commission, which had three Western members appointed by the United Nations and two Afghan members. The Afghan members were appointed by the Supreme Court and the Independent Election Commission. The Independent Election Commission unsurprisingly supported Karzai and was willing to certify the election as aboveboard. The UN-dominated

Electoral Complaints Commission, however, put its foot down, insisted on a recount and threw out over a million votes that it determined were fraudulent. The recount reduced the incumbent's proportion of the vote to 48 percent and looked set to force Karzai into a run-off with Abdallah by October, but the latter withdrew from the race on the grounds that the Karzai-appointed Independent Election Commission could not be trusted to oversee upright elections in the second round more scrupulously than it had in the first. Karzai might have won the 2009 election anyway, but the process was too flawed to allow a clear answer to that question. It seems clear that democratization in Afghanistan, if by that is meant elections marked by transparency in which the loser agrees to vacate the office, has decisively failed.

Not only had Karzai packed the Independent Election Commission but in February 2010 he took control of the supposedly actually-independent Electoral Complaints Commission, announcing that he would appoint all 5 of its members, cutting out the United Nations.[16] The subsequent parliamentary elections of September, 2010, could not be held in 20 percent of the country because of security concerns (the Taliban forbade participation in the voting and threatened reprisals). There were allegations of widespread fraud, with some 4,000 subsequent complaints flooding in. Ultimately, two bodies looked into the issue of parliamentary ballot fraud. Karzai appointed a special tribunal, which attempted to unseat 62 of those elected, who for the most part were political foes of the president. The Independent Electoral Commission, in contrast, disqualified only nine of those elected. The crisis produced by Karzai's attempt to turn out rival members of parliament was only worsened by the differing rulings on who might stay and who had to go. Karzai attempted to smooth over the conflict with a vaguely worded decree, which was so opaque that no one could understand its

concrete purport. Parliament then took up the question of whether the president should be impeached and removed. From early September 2011, protesters began gathering in Kabul to denounce Karzai and his Western allies, and to support the parliamentarians who were in danger of being disqualified.[17] Again, for a fourth of the seats in the elected parliament still to be disputed a year after the election, and for the president himself to be wounded by questions of electoral fraud in 2009 and a debate on impeachment, does not meet even the minimal Schumpeterian criteria for democracy.

Democracy in Afghanistan was thwarted for a number of reasons. The transition was precluded from being inclusive, since the US gave close air support to the Northern Alliance in overthrowing the Taliban altogether. Although over time Karzai has brought Pushtuns loyal to himself into the government, the new regime began by being largely a Northern Alliance affair, so that most figures powerful under the Taliban were swept away. Thus, an alliance of regime soft liners and moderate dissidents was forestalled. The Northern Alliance was a radical opposition from the point of view of the Taliban establishment, and it was enabled to make a revolution by the US and NATO. The former Taliban and their clients were thus sullen and underground, and gradually created an insurgency. Even under the best of circumstances, the endeavor was fraught. A largely rural country with a 28 percent literacy rate that is the fifth poorest nation in the world was not a very good candidate to succeed in the first place. The new Afghanistan National Army is widely believed to be corrupt, and the officer corps was appointed by Karzai, giving him a behind the scenes ally. Much of the country is not in government control, and the state does not have by any means a monopoly on the use of violence. Indeed, armed groups roam much of the country at will, and security is poor.

President Obama decided on an escalation of the Afghanistan War late in 2009, deploying a robust counter-insurgency doctrine.[18] Ironically, this approach in some ways indebted Washington to the Karzai government and made it difficult or impossible for outside agencies to challenge Karzai's various power-grabs. Karzai was publicly warned to conduct aboveboard elections by no less than Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. When he instead engaged in electoral fraud, and emerged as the winner under questionable circumstances, the Obama administration had little choice but to acquiesce. Its counter-insurgency doctrine required a reliable local political partner who could gain the allegiance of the populace. While it seemed increasingly unlikely that Karzai could fulfill that role, no plausible alternative was on the horizon. Since Abdullah Abdullah's main power base was the Tajiks, whereas Pashtuns supported Karzai in much greater numbers, an Abdullah victory could well have worsened the insurgency, led mainly by aggrieved Pashtuns who had joined Muslim fundamentalist groups.

The Iraqi transition was if anything more troubled than that of Afghanistan. It suffered from many of the same disabilities. Iraq's per capita real income every year when the US first invaded in 2003 was only $800 a year. Although it is $2000 or more in 2010, some of that increase is illusory. Petroleum production and prices have risen, but there is little reason to think that the income has trickled down to the people. The actual per capita income, once petroleum is subtracted, is therefore likely still quite low. On the other hand, as with poppies in Afghanistan, the presence of a high-priced primary commodity (in Iraq's case petroleum), combined with a weak central government, has led to very substantial gasoline smuggling and to violence among militias, gangs and tribes competing for control of the refineries and smuggling routes.[19]

Iraq is a multi-ethnic society, with Shiite Arabs in the south and center, Sunni Arabs in the center and north, and mostly Sunni Kurds in the north, along with smaller groups such as Turkmen (about evenly split between Sunnis and Shiites). Despite a rhetoric of national unity, these ethnic and religious divisions were characterized by violent histories and profound grievances. The secular Baath government, dominated (though not exclusively so) by Sunni Arabs, had massacred Kurds in 1988 out of suspicion they were tilting to Iran during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and seeking independence. In the wake of the 1990-1991 Gulf War, when Shiites rose up in the south, the Baath military put the rebellion down with great brutality and was said to have killed as many as 60,000. After the fall of the Baath in 2003 at Anglo-American hands and the rise of a new government dominated by Shiites and Kurds, a Sunni Arab insurgency waged a deadly campaign of violence against the new order, with bombing campaigns still common as late as 2011. In 2006-2007, civil war broke out between Sunnis and Shiites, leading to the ethnic cleansing of most Sunnis from Baghdad. Violence was also common, though not on the same scale, between Kurds and Arabs in the north. This history of deep ethnic divisions and grievances, and ongoing ethnic violence, posed profound obstacles to any democratic transition after 2003.

It is not clear that the Bush administration was dedicated to a thoroughgoing democratization of the country in any case. Indeed, the administration went through post-conquest plans one after another. At first the Department of Defense was determined to install Ahmad Chalabi and his Iraqi National Congress in power, rather on the model of Karzai in Afghanistan. A national congress with handpicked delegates was initially planned. The State Department discovered this plan and won an internal battle to scuttle it, with President George W. Bush sending Paul Bremer as civil administrator. With the growth of a Sunni guerrilla

movement through summer, 2003, and the massive explosion at the shrine of Ali in Najaf on August 29, 2003, which killed Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, it became increasingly clear that Bremer could not hope to rule Iraq. (Al-Hakim was the leader of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, among the foremost political parties among the Shiites, and his death caused confidence in American competence among Bush's Shiite allies to collapse). In November of 2003, Bush and Bremer announced yet another plan, to hold "caucus-based" elections. The plan was to assemble the members of the provincial and some municipal councils that had been massaged into being by the State Department and its civilian subcontractors, who were Iraqi notables willing to cooperate with the British and Americans, and have them elect a prime minister. This plan was rejected by Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, who demanded open, one-person, one vote elections. He won, and Bush was forced to schedule them for January, 2005. In the meantime the US and the UN, in consultation with Bremer's appointed Interim Governing Council, selected Iyad Allawi, an ex-Baathist and a CIA asset who had worked in London in the 1990s to recruit defecting members of the Baath officer corps for coup attempts against Saddam Hussein.

Over the period from 2005 through 2010, Iraq held three parliamentary elections and two rounds of provincial elections.[20] The January, 2005, elections in Iraq did not meet international standards. Most candidates could not campaign because of the poor security. A closed list system was used, so that voters had little idea for whom they were voting, though they could pick a list on the basis of its announced ideology. Voters were in some danger as the voted, and most had to walk to neighborhood polling stations because of a lockdown of vehicle traffic. The Sunni Arab population boycotted the vote almost in its entirety, producing a parliament dominated by the fundamentalist Shiite parties, with the Kurdistan

Alliance as their junior partners. The Shiite parties elected Ibrahim Ja`fari Prime Minister. A physician, he headed the returned London branch of the Da`wa Party, founded in the late 1950s to work for a Shiite, Islamic state in Iraq. The December, 2005, parliamentary elections produced the same results, though this time the Sunni Arabs joined the vote, returning Sunni fundamentalist MPs for the most part.[21]

In the wake of the second round of parliamentary elections, a movement grew to remove Ibrahim Ja`fari. He had alienated the Kurds by going to Ankara and discussing with Turkey how to prevent the oil-rich province of Kirkuk from being annexed by the Kurdistan Regional Government. He had alienated the Americans by his closeness to Iran and by his ineffectiveness as a leader. The Shiite clerical leadership in Najaf was disturbed at his inability to tamp down the political violence afflicting the country. And so the US and the Kurds put pressure on the Shiite coalition, the United Iraqi Alliance, to choose an alternative. It held a party congress and Nuri al-Maliki of the Da`wa Party narrowly won out over Adil Abdul Mahdi of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, largely because al-Maliki's Da`wa support was augmented by that of the Sadr Movement of Muqtada al-Sadr, which had been brought into the United Iraqi Alliance in fall of 2005 as part of a united Shiite front for the parliamentary elections. While these events had the outward form of a democracy, insofar as an election was held and those elected took office, and those defeated went home, the reality was more sordid. Many of the parties sitting in parliament were intertwined with the militias fighting in the streets, who would ultimately decide the shape of power.[22] The prime minister was removed in some large part through the insistence of the American ambassador. The situation rather resembled that of India or Lebanon under British and French colonial rule, where there were also parliamentary

elections in the absence of true popular sovereignty, with often heavy-handed foreign intervention.

Al-Maliki had come to power through the support of the Sadrist faction of Shiite fundamentalists, which maintained a Mahdi Army paramilitary. Initially, al-Maliki depended heavily on the Mahdi Army as his own military arm, since the newly trained Iraqi military was not yet very competent and in any case was not known to be loyal to the prime minister. In the summer of 2007, the leader of the Sadrists and their Mahdi Army, Muqtada al-Sadr, led a campaign to have al-Maliki cease meeting and teleconferencing with George W. Bush, and to have the prime minister set a specific timetable for the withdrawal of US troops from the country. Al-Maliki declined to be so pressured, and the Sadrists withdrew from the government, sitting thereafter in the opposition benches. Al-Maliki, furious, at first turned for support to another Shiite fundamentalist group, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, led by Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim. ISCI had its own paramilitary, the Badr Corps, which had originally been formed and trained by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps when ISCI was in exile in Iran in the 1980s and 1990s. In 2007, as part of the Bush troop escalation, the US military under Gen. David Petraeus put pressure on the Mahdi Army, and Muqtada al-Sadr, its clerical leader, was forced to flee to Iran and to declare his militia disbanded. Al-Maliki, apparently wary of being political hostage to one party-militia after another, gradually established forward operating bases in the Shiite south, to which he detailed regular army field officers who were induced to report directly to the prime minister. He thereby bypassed both the US Pentagon and CIA and his own minister of defense (who had hardly been a Maliki loyalist).

In spring of 2008, al-Maliki deployed the new Iraqi army against Mahdi Army positions in Basra. Initially the campaign went poorly, with some pro-Sadr

elements in the military defecting. But in the end, the new military defeated the Mahdi Army, it is said with help from the Badr Corps. Al-Maliki is then said to have inducted thousands of Badr Corps fighters into the army. He then sent the army against the Mahdi Army in Nasiriya and in Sadr City (East Baghdad), defeating it and making it lie low in each instance. Al-Maliki's success in becoming a military leader admittedly depended very heavily on American logistics help and on US close air support for his operations. Al-Maliki went on to establish tribal militias among Shiites in the south that also reported directly to him. His political adversaries accused him of making a soft coup and becoming a behind the scenes military dictator. But compared to his predecessor, the ineffectual and virtually powerless Jaafari, al-Maliki had begun making the prime ministership of Iraq count for something with regard to power politics for the first time since Nouri al-Sa'id in the 1940s and 1950s.

The parliamentary elections of March 7, 2010, resulted in a near-majority for the Shiite religious parties, as in the previous two elections. This time, however, they had split into two major factions, and found it difficult to form another coalition with one another. Al-Maliki had alienated the movement of Muqtada al-Sadr by his 2008 military move against it. The election thus resulted in a hung parliament, with four major blocs. These included the Iraqiya List of Iyad Allawi, which grouped secular middle class Shiites and Sunnis, but in this election became a largely Sunni Arab party, and which gained 91 seats. Coming in second with 89 seats was the State of Law coalition of incumbent prime minister al-Maliki, at the core of which was his Da`wa or Islamic Mission Party, along with smaller Shiite religious parties. The third largest bloc, at 70 seats, was the National Iraqi Alliance, which consisted of the more fundamentalist religious parties, including the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), led by cleric Ammar al-Hakim, the

Sadr Bloc, led by cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, and some other smaller factions. The Sadrists gained almost 40 seats out of the 70, and so were the weightiest bloc within this coalition. The fourth bloc was the Kurdistan Alliance. Forming a government required three of them to ally with one another so as to gain a majority (163 out of 225 seats).

Both before and after the election, the Justice and Accountability Commission, led by corrupt financier and political operator Ahmad Chalabi, attempted to disqualify Iraqiya candidates on grounds of their having had too strong a connection to the old, banned, Baath Party. This commission's work threatened to unravel the whole election, and its witch hunts cast a shadow on the legitimacy of the electoral process as far as Sunni Arabs were concerned. Its two most prominent members were themselves members of the National Iraqi Alliance, and so could be seen as acting for partisan purposes rather than neutral, national ones.

In the months after March, interminable wrangling went on. Guerrilla and militia groups took advantage of the interregnum to take turf and engage in destabilizing operations. The US government made a concerted effort to install as prime minister, or at least as a high official with power over the security forces, its old client, Iyad Allawi, whose Iraqiya party had attracted the allegiance of some 80 percent of the Sunni Arabs, who had swung back toward their traditional secularism in 2010. Allawi was emboldened by American backing to decline to make a more realistic political deal, further delaying the formation of a government. It may also be that by then the new officer corps had been so extensively coopted by al-Maliki that for it to swing around and give its loyalty to Allawi was a little implausible. While his argument, that the Iraqi constitution specifies that the largest bloc in parliament be asked by the president to form the

government, was correct, he did not seem to understand that such a request would only present an opportunity to attempt to put together the 163 seats needed to govern, and did not imply an automatic accession to power. Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, a Sunni and a prominent member of the Iraqiya List, expressed anxiety and concern over the meetings in Tehran of the Shiite parties—which aimed at cobbling back together the Shiite alliance. He denounced them as naked interference by a neighbor in Iraq's internal affairs. He also argued that the next president of Iraq should be an Arab and not a Kurd.[23] Al-Hashimi's denunciation of the Shiites as cat's paws of Iran and his urging that the Kurds be marginalized did not help Allawi to form a government, since he needed pro-Iran Shiites as well as Kurds to do so.

At the same time, Iran made efforts to convince the Shiite parties to reestablish their old alliance, and actually called party leaders and newly elected members of parliament to Tehran for the purpose of forging a coalition between al-Maliki's State of Law and the NAI.[24] These efforts initially foundered on the opposition to al-Maliki of Muqtada al-Sadr. By the beginning of October, 2010, however, Iranian insistence had worn down al-Sadr, resident in the seminary city of Qom, and al-Maliki for his part appears to have offered sufficient inducements for the Sadrists to join with the State of Law and finally form a government with the help of the Kurdistan Alliance. In September and October of 2010, as well, the Obama administration's objections to al-Maliki appear to have abruptly evaporated, or perhaps it finally became clear to Washington that Allawi's 91 seats did him no good, since he could not find the partners that would take him to 163. Any role for the new Iraqi military in these maneuverings was never adverted to in the Iraqi press and it probably was not central. That, however, al-Maliki had successfully deployed the military to restore a modicum of security to Basra, that

many officers were loyal to him, and that he had his own tribal militias, were certainly points in his favor, with the electorate, with potential coalition partners (other than the Sadrists), with Iran, and with the US.

Though al-Maliki finally formed a government in November, 2010, long months of indecision deeply wounded the Iraqi public’s faith in the electoral process and one could not exactly say that Iraq had had a successful transition to democracy. Iranian and American intervention is still heavy-handed and widely resented. Al-Maliki’s survival into a second term does not directly contradict the democratic model, since it depended on ordinary Westminster-model parliamentary elections and post-election coalition-building. But had he not also been a military leader and had he not had the fierce support of Iran and the lukewarm acquiescence of the US, it is not clear that he could have survived so long (seven months!) as a caretaker prime minister nor that he could have on his own fended off the challenges from other plausible candidates or put together a parliamentary majority. Iyad Allawi never accepted the legitimacy of the second al-Maliki government, and keeps calling for early elections. The Sunni Arabs who backed his Iraqiya Party were so frustrated by continued Shiite dominance that one of their leading politicians, Osama Nujayfi, actually began speaking of the possibility of a Sunni secession. The Kurds have a virtually autonomous country within Iraq, and gave their blessing to al-Maliki in part because he was willing to grant them continued autonomy.

The failure of Bush democratization in Iraq had some of the same roots as the failure in Afghanistan. The US invasion essentially involved an alliance with the Kurdish Peshmerga paramilitary and with Shiite underground militias against the Baath Party of Saddam Hussein. The latter was altogether overthrown, and few regime soft liners came over to the new system or were permitted to. The

“debaathification commission” headed by Chalabi and other Shiites fired tens of thousands capable Sunni Arabs from government positions, driving them into insurgency. The neoliberal policy of the Defense Department, which involved the destruction of state-owned industries, threw large numbers of Sunnis out of work.[25] The Baath military was given no opportunity to splinter, and was summarily dissolved by the Bush administration. The new army was only gradually built up, and ultimately it became dominated by the Shiites, despite American attempts to reinsert Sunni officers. Large numbers of Shiite militiamen appear to have been inducted in 2006-2008. In conditions of on-going guerilla war and severe faction-fighting even within communities, the prime minister’s control of the military allowed him increasingly to establish a soft authoritarian state.

The stunning victory of the militant Muslim fundamentalist Hamas Party in the Palestinian elections of January 2006 underlined the central contradictions in the Bush administration's policies toward the Middle East. Bush pushed for elections, confusing them with democracy, but seemed blind to the dangers of right-wing populism. As a result, Sunni fundamentalist parties, some with ties to violent cells, emerged as key players in Iraq, Egypt and Palestine.

Hamas’s victory on January 26, 2006, created a profound ambivalence in Washington. In his press conference soon after the election, Bush said: "The people are demanding honest government. The people want services.” Bush allowed then Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to sideline the ruling Fatah Party of Yasser Arafat, to fire missiles at its police stations, and to reduce its leader to a besieged nonentity. Sharon ordered the serial assassinations of civilian Hamas leaders in Gaza, making them martyrs. Frustrated, the Palestinian public predictably swung to the far right, though opinion polling makes it clear that few

who voted for Hamas shared their political and social program Rather, they were weary of the Palestinian Authority and believed that Hamas would be more effective negotiating partners with the Israelis. As a Saudi political talk show host told the Associated Press, "They [Hamas] will be the Arab Sharon. They will be tough, but only a tough group can snatch concessions from Israel."[26]

In a mystifying self-contradiction, Bush trumpeted that "the Palestinians had an election yesterday, the results of which remind me about the power of democracy." If elections were really the same as democracy, and if Bush was so happy about the process, then we might have expected him to pledge to work with the results, which by his lights would be intrinsically good. Instead, Bush was saying that even though elections are democracy and democracy is good and powerful, it produced unacceptable results in this case, and so the resulting Hamas government would lack the legitimacy necessary to allow the United States to deal with it or go forward in any peace process.

President Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah had earlier been elected in a separate process. Bush said, "We'd like him to stay in power.” Khaled Mashaal, the Hamas leader in exile in Syria, said that his party would be willing to work with Abbas as president, according to a party spokesman. But then when Bush was asked if the United States would end aid to the Palestinian Authority if a Hamas government was formed, he implied that it would, unless Hamas changed its platform, which opposes the existence of the state of Israel on the grounds that the territory belongs to the Palestinians. The charge that Hamas is inherently violent and therefore an unacceptable partner suffers from essentialism. From 1994 to 2004, Hamas’s military wing launched many suicide attacks against Israelis, killing hundreds of people, most of them civilians. Despite Hamas' founding position that the Israeli state is illegitimate, however, violence is not foreordained.

A Hamas leader, Mahmoud Zahar, told the Associated Press that his party would continue what he called its year-old "truce" if Israel did the same.

No truce would be allowed. Bush and the Israelis announced that they would refuse to deal with Hamas, and they cut off aid to the Palestine Authority (which had a deleterious effect on institutions such as hospitals, to which the funding had been passed by the PA). Hamas members of the PA assembly met and elected Ismail Haniyeh prime minister, and he chose a cabinet. The Israelis began capturing Hamas representatives and cabinet members, whisking them away to Israeli prisons. By summer of 2007 the Bush administration had orchestrated a coup against the Hamas government in the West Bank by the secular Fatah faction led by PA President Mahmoud Abbas. A similar attempt to overthrow Hamas in Gaza failed. Mahmoud Abbas extra-constitutionally appointed a Fatah prime minister, Salam Fayyad, who was known as a competent administrator but who was not a product of popular sovereignty or of an even vaguely constitutional process.

In the aftermath of the failed coup, the Israelis slapped a Draconian blockade on Gaza, explicitly aimed at punishing civilian Gazans for having voted Hamas into power and for having declined to overthrow it. The blockade contributed to great misery in the Palestinian population of Gaza, many of whom still live in refugee camps, having fled there from what is now Israel during the ethnic cleansing campaigns of 1948. It did not, however, lead to the fall of the rump Hamas government. In the end, and despite a long-term successful cease-fire, the Olmert government launched a destructive war on Gaza in winter 2008-2009.

The deadline passed for further elections for the Palestine Authority as called for in its charter, so that both the caretaker presidency of Abbas and the Hamas statelet in Gaza receded further and further into illegitimacy. Palestine was

not a prime candidate for successful transition to democracy. The GDP per capita is only about $1400, less than Egypt. The conditions of occupation and (in Gaza) blockade make free movement and organization difficult. Palestinians suffered economic downward mobility in the twenty-first century and many even became food insecure (a majority became so in Gaza, from which the Israelis interdicted all exports from 2007 onwards). Unlike Afghanistan and Iraq, Palestine is ethnically relatively homogeneous (most Palestinians are Sunni Muslims and the Christian population is shrinking through emigration; but there is fairly good cooperation between Christians and Muslims). But the differences in political culture between the West Bank and Gaza have provoked firefights between Fatah and Hamas paramilitaries and function as ethnic divides do elsewhere. The Western-trained and equipped Palestine Authority security forces, backed by Fatah guerrillas, successfully intervened against Hamas in the West Bank, and it is those security forces more than popular sovereignty that explain Mahmoud Abbas’s extra-constitutional tenure as president.[27]

But the primary cause for the failure of the 2006 elections to produce a democratic regime lie with the United State and Israel, which actively undermined and ultimately destroyed the elected government because Hamas was unacceptable to them. External intervention and neocolonialism need to be added to the reasons for which democracy fails if the Palestine Authority is to be explained.

The four cases of attempted democratic transition by force or pressure from the outside considered here, Egypt, Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine, were chosen by Bush for short-term tactical reasons, not because they were good candidates for such an experiment based on their social indicators. All four are poverty-stricken, and poverty is negatively correlated with successful democratic transitions. Two

of the four are multi-ethnic societies with severe ethnic grievances and a history of violence, which tells against democratic stability. Although Palestine is not similarly ethnically divided, being mostly Sunni Muslim, its secular-religious and party divide, between Hamas and Fateh, functions in a similar way. (Particular *hamulahs* or clans have thrown in with one or the other, especially given that they are geographically rooted in Gaza or the West Bank, so that there is even a proto-ethnic dimension to this political rivalry). Egypt is fairly homogeneous ethnically, being largely Sunni Muslim but with a Coptic Christian minority of about 10 percent. Two of the four depend heavily on a single high-priced primary commodity, oil in the case of Iraq and poppies in that of Afghanistan, which is correlated with high rates of social and political violence and political instability. Palestine’s main analogue to such an income is its dependence on government and NGO aid, over which Hamas and Fatah have struggled, so that this sort of strategic rent has caused violence in the same way that primary commodity production might. Egypt is, again, an outlier in this regard, having multiple sources of income, including agriculture and tourism, and a growing light industry and services sector. In Egypt, the failure of democratic transition in the Bush era rested most heavily on the unity of the elite, the cohesion of the military and security officers and officials, and the inability of Kefaya and Ghad to mobilize sufficient numbers of people in the streets at that time effectively to challenge the regime. In the Palestine Authority as well, the coup against the Hamas democratization of electoral politics was made by the PA security forces and Fatah guerrillas. In Afghanistan, Karzai’s power grab depended at least in part on the Afghanistan National Army’s backing for him, as well as his knowledge that the US and NATO were fighting the insurgents for him and would support him. Despite the rise of a soft authoritarianism in the form of Nuri al-Maliki’s regime in Iraq, the new Iraqi

military was less salient in preserving the prime minister's power than in the other three cases. In Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine there are multiple warring armed guerrilla groups, tribal gangs and criminal cartels not under central government control, attesting to state failure. Ironically, Egypt, the least democratic of the four, is also the most secure and the least like a failed state.

We may conclude that muscular Wilsonianism failed in the Middle East in part because the candidates chosen by Bush for this exercise were poor candidates, and because the method of externally-imposed democratization is highly problematic. By invading Afghanistan and Iraq, Bush essentially allied the US with what were in those systems the "radical" faction and completely overthrew both the hard liners and the regime reformers. This total revolution forestalled an alliance between regime reformers and outside moderate dissidents, simply removing the former along with the hardliners. The consequent polarization between a broad swathe of former regime supporters and a new elite that saw them as analogous to former Nazis in post-war Germany, drove both Afghanistan and Iraq toward civil war. Likewise, the very presence of foreign occupying troops polarized politics and encouraged suicide bombing and guerrilla warfare. The new elite of moderates and radicals, confident of foreign military backing, showed an unwillingness to compromise with former regime supporters, often driving the latter into violent opposition. This method of invasion also destroyed the existing military, giving its officers no chance to split with the regime, and requiring a long and laborious attempt to build a new military, which often took on a strong ethnic coloration—the ethnicity of the newly-installed regime..

Nor were the candidates for the most part strong choices. If Bush's, and his advisers', analogy was to the post-Soviet transformations in Eastern Europe, he chose the countries that looked more like Yugoslavia than like Poland. As noted,

foreign military occupation was a feature of three of the cases, and in each of the three it provoked guerrilla opposition and suicide bombings of a destabilizing sort (Hamas in Palestine, the Islamic State of Iraq in Iraq, the Taliban and kindred groups in Afghanistan). In Afghanistan the guerrilla opposition preceded the occupation, but it was quiescent for some time after the 2001 war, and it was arguably the US and NATO large military footprint that spurred it to large-scale insurgency again in the second half of the zeroes. Even in Egypt, the military benefited from 30 years of lucrative strategic rent doled out by the US, as a means of supporting American interests in the eastern Mediterranean, so the continued strength of the Egyptian army is in part a by-product of neo-imperialism. In an important dialectic in the other three cases, the anti-occupation guerrilla movements impelled the foreigners to train and equip growing and increasingly effective military and security forces in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan, and in each case these forces ultimately played relatively anti-democratic roles. Muscular Wilsonianism fails, where the occupation regime lacks firm control over the occupied society or is unable to coopt significant portions of the public, precisely because the imperial powers then decide they need praetorian allies more than they need genuine democracy.

Not only did Bush’s democratization largely fail, it left a series of messes behind for the Obama administration. The Obama team increasingly put an emphasis on enlarging and training the Afghan security forces, over to which it intends to hand the country as soon as possible, and talk of democratization in Kabul has rather declined. Obama, having withdrawn from Iraq, appears sanguine about a soft coup by al-Maliki, even one supported by Iran. The administration initially ceased pressuring the Mubarak regime to open up, in accordance with its pragmatic predilections, though it let Mubarak go at the last moment as he was

clearly falling. Obama during his first year and a half invested significant political capital in moving toward a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, but was beholden in that process to the right wing government of Binyamin Netanyahu, as well as to Mahmoud Abbas and Fatah, which made the 2007 coup and are now ruling the West Bank extra-constitutionally. Obama could have pushed for new PA elections when they were due, in January of 2010, but did not. Even the municipal elections scheduled for summer of 2010 were mysteriously postponed. Obama's keynote has been pragmatism and laying the foundation for American disentanglement from the Middle East, even if in two cases (Afghanistan and Palestine) intensified US efforts, whether military or diplomatic, were felt necessary to lay the foundation for that disengagement.

In one of foreign policy's great ironies, the democratization that the Bush administration made the centerpiece of its Middle East policy failed miserably in 2001-2009, whereas the cautious Obama administration suddenly found itself face to face with massive instability and popular movements for democracy throughout the region in spring of 2011. There is no obvious connection between the Arab Spring and the Bush projects. Iraq was cited by no activists as a model, and, indeed, twitter feeds from Tahrir Square in Cairo during the uprising against Mubarak often urged that the mistakes made in Iraq be avoided. It was if anything a negative example. Tunisia and Egypt were far more urban, literate and ethnically united than Iraq and Afghanistan, had more diverse economies, and had a higher standard of living with more mature institutions. The roots of their movements must be sought elsewhere than in Washington think tanks or in the disastrous Bush occupations.

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