Democracy: Instrument of Peace or Instability

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The acceptance or dismissal of democracy varies throughout the world. Democracy has reached all parts of the world as of 2017, and despite the western popular belief that it is the best form of government, the best system of government is dependent on the citizens that reside there. However, the United States’ State Department denotes the policy that “Democracy and respect for human rights have long been central components of U.S. foreign policy. Supporting democracy not only promotes such fundamental American values as religious freedom and worker rights, but also helps create a more secure, stable, and prosperous global arena in which the United States can advance its national interests.”

Though democracy allows for the United States, European countries, and parts of South America to function at their best, the same cannot be said of many other countries. The government of a state is dependent on the will of the people living within it and oftentimes, democracy is not necessarily the best option. In some cases, free elections can result in the establishing of power by groups not necessarily popular among the entire state or by Western powers. Democracy can inhibit progress and decisions from being made which can lead to civil unrest among the not empowered faction groups. It can lead to an overall weaker state with less authority, which in turn may result in instability or in an extreme, anarchism. Frequently, the satisfaction of the populace is driven by the competency of their government and the provision of human security as displayed in cases across the Middle East.

Democracy is a relatively new concept in the Near East and has seen limited success with the exception of several occasions. It’s promotion throughout the region was a key policy of the Bush and Obama administrations. Following the Arab Spring of 2010, various populations under dictatorships yearned for the establishment of democratic governments.

In Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak, the leader for over three decades, faced massive reformist protests regarding the issues of unemployment, poverty, corruption, and a

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tyrannical government. After much bloodshed and unrest, the leader stepped down and
allowed for the democratization of Egypt to commence. Shortly thereafter, in the
parliamentary elections, the Muslim Brotherhood won the majority of seats and the newly
elected leader Mohammed Morsi took office. President Morsi subsequently generated public
outrage when he granted himself far-reaching powers and implemented an Islamic
constitution. President Morsi was able to retain little power over the military and influence
over the people, resulting in his ousting. This created a chaotic environment and resulted in
further disarray until the military administrators consolidated power and Abdul Fattah al-Sisi
became leader. Since his coming to office, he has declared the Muslim Brotherhood a
terrorist group and imprisoned many of his critics. Egypt naturally reverted to the
government of a strongman, not much different than that of the Mubarak regime. The form of
government that has been in practice in Egypt since the 1940s, still continues to this day.
Despite the current stability of Egypt, a divergent situation worsened in the neighboring
country of Libya.

An armed Libyan revolution in 2011, led to the dismantling of the four decade long
erratic rule of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi’s regime. The protesters who evolved into
anti-government separatists were calling for democracy and fair trial, however the results of
the revolution were much different. Seeking it’s right to protect, the United States became
heavily involved in supporting the rebels and received security council authorization to “use
all means necessary” to protect civilians, which resulted in the deployment of US forces in
the country. Once Gaddafi’s military was defeated, the various rebel groups interested in
establishing a democratic government, begun fighting each other. Though the reason for the
unrest was an unruly and tyrannical leader, his ousting led to Libya becoming a collapsed
state. Unrest similar to these cases was becoming common throughout the Arab world, which is how the time period came to be known as the “Arab Spring.”

Following the deposing of Saddam Hussein, the United States attempted to form a democratic system of government in Iraq. The United States, after destroying the Iraqi military and the de baathification process, began to establish local governments and eventually a constitution and federal government. However, this prompted a spike in civil unrest and terrorist attacks on the new Iraqi and American occupying governments. Daniel Byman, a security studies professor at Georgetown University, predicted at the start of the occupation in 2003, what would occur if and when Iraq’s government failed. He stated in a Georgetown University report that “A failure of Iraq’s democracy could prove a nightmare for the Iraqis, for the region, and for the United States. Civil war, massive refugee flows, and even renewed interstate fighting could return to this already unstable region. If the United States and its allies are not willing to bear the burden of occupation, the long-term strategic costs will be heavy.”

All of his predictions become accurate displays of post-American occupation Iraq.

In the Middle East, the people are strongly resistant to democracy, as shown by the examples and by the fact that not a single democracy with the exception of Israel exists. This resistance occurs for a number of reasons. The colonial divisions of the Near East have had a great impact on modern day societies and governments. Extending the harm of these divisions is the Sykes-Picot Agreement which was negotiated by an Englishman and a Frenchman who knew little of local cultures, tribal affairs, religious differences or geopolitics of the region. It’s division of certain groups by the careless drawing of borders has resulted in the Lebanese Civil War, Israeli-Palestinian issues, as well as Kurdish struggles. Because of these borders, ethnic and religious groups are extremely divided throughout the region, creating political issues that would be escalated under a democracy. There are such a

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myriad of these groups that their rivalries would certainly result in violence and inhibit the
country from building a liberal democracy. The European rulers neglected to implement their
democratic ideas unto the Arab subjects, allowing them to continue more primitive styles of
governance. Furthermore, these societies were prohibited from advancing their political
structures also because of the social norms in the region. This is shown in The Telegraph,
where Andrew Green describes a Middle Eastern decentralized system that prioritizes tribal
units, family, sect, and personal relationships over government. Considering the
complicated societal norms, the peoples of these countries are more prone to the “favour for
favour” system as opposed to the rule of law. Hence why a democracy has failed to function
among these countries and they have remained most stable under dictatorships. Though
many Westemers would like to see a democratic Middle East, it is not a likely scenario at
least for the time being. Despite this example of a failure of democracy, Eastern Europe has
seen very different results.

Following the second World War, Europe was divided by the allies such that the
Soviets would control all of the Eastern half including Poland, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania,
Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. This led to the forcing of the adoption of totalitarian
communist governments similar to that of the Soviet Union. Regardless of the dissatisfaction
of those who remained in post-war Eastern Europe, the Soviet style government type was
enforced until four decades later. The democratization of Europe began with the reunification
of Germany and the toppling of the dictatorship in Poland in 1989. Following these events,
the rest of former communist Eastern Europe became democratic in 1992.

Poland, leading the efforts of reform in the late 1980s and defying the Soviet Union’s
control, became one of the first democratic states in Eastern Europe. The people, sick of

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7Ibid.,
10Ibid.,
communism and repression, went on strike, eventually drawing the attention of their
government. This resulted in the Polish parliament electing the first non-communist president
in 1989, Lech Wałęsa, leader of the solidarity movement. The Polish people accepted the
notion of a non-communist, democratic government very easily and for the only time in the
20th century, Poland had a major victory. The acceptance of this across the country was
evident as the new government received support from the two most powerful forces in
Poland: the army and the church. The political transition also came with economic changes,
leading to the creation of a capitalist economy. Poland received immediate support from the
international community especially among western European countries and the United
States, and nearly a decade later they became a NATO and EU member. Evidently,
democracy was chosen by the people to function in Poland and caused the country to thrive.
One of Poland’s neighbors, East Germany, defeated the forced Soviet idea of communism
as well.

After the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which marked the collapse of the Soviet
Union, East Germany merged with its western counterpart. However, this transition to
democracy was one of the easiest as it did not involve the creation of a new government, but
just the modification of the West German one to integrate the east into the Bundestag.
Furthermore, the East German people, who prior to world war two lived in a democracy,
called for free elections and protested communism. The German people, all with a great
understanding of the democratic system, were capable of integrating into the West German
government style. Following the collapse of the totalitarian East German government and
reunification of Germany, the country has been thriving and the former East German
provinces have seen exponential economic growth following democratization and the

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establishment of capitalism. This creation of a unified democratic Germany allowed for the country to not only stabilize, but become one of the most powerful ones in the region. As was the situation with Poland, East Germany was widely accepted by the West, along with many other countries such as Hungary.

In 1989, Hungary went democratic, defying four decades of communist dictatorial rule. Under similar circumstances to Poland and East Germany, Hungary ushered in a system of free elections. However, Hungary does not have a history of democracy and after receiving independence in 1918, there was a communist dictator who was ousted the same year he came to power and then a regency for the next twenty-five years. After the forced establishment of a communist dictatorship by the Soviets, Hungarians were dissatisfied and attempted to revolt on multiple occasions. Following the killing of anti-Soviet protestors in 1956, Hungary nearly revolted which resulted in the replacement of the Hungarian dictator. After several transitions of power in just a few years, Imre Nagy came to power with a wave of popularity. Nagy attempted to establish a multiparty democratic system as well as strong ties with the west. However, he was shortly silenced when the Soviet Union attacked Hungary and exiled him to Romania where he would later face execution. Furthermore, once the Soviet Union was weakened, there was a path for democracy. The Hungarians in 1989, held a fair election, allowing anyone to participate and even elected a former dissident. The former ruling communist party only received 14% of the vote. The implemented capitalistic policies by the newly elected government, turned around Hungary's economy and stimulated foreign investment and domestic growth. The transition to democracy came without resistance and they continue to grow to this day after the Soviet Union's forced dictatorial communist government prohibited them from making improvements. Besides the positive

14 Ibid.,
15 Ibid.,
reaction to democracy and free elections from Hungarians, they also received strong support from the international community and the country is currently an EU and NATO member.

The primary reason for the success of the eastern European democracies is that they have shared their continent with essential "super democracies" to the west. The government types of France, the United Kingdom, Northern Europe, West Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands,, and many others are democracies that have existed for decades. This government style and it’s success would certainly seem optimal, especially to eastern Europe considering the similarities between the regions. A classic example of the comparison of European democracy to dictatorship would be considering the two sides of Berlin. On one side there were beautiful parks, storefronts, nightclubs, museums and on the other there were run down government buildings and buildings still being rebuilt from a war that was long over. Not only did this deprivation of fair governance cause economic issues, but social as well. Among all of the communist countries civil unrest was frequent and towards the end of the 20th century, once the Soviets could no longer enforce their policies on these client states, anti-communist demonstrations became common which led to the collapse of the USSR and the creation of what former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld would call “New Europe”

The handling of these situations by the United States government and the international community vary. In the Middle East, the international community worked to resolve the conflict very poorly. Many of the plans to support the implementation of democracy in the region have been abandoned by their architects as well as the U.S. military’s support. Furthermore, American led coalitions have toppled authoritarian governments, however they did not devise a strategy on rebuilding the government or maintaining order in these countries such as Libya and Iraq. The only occurrence where the United States has continued the support of a group in the region is for anti-government Syrian rebels. But this support likely stems from the United States national interest in its
proxy war with the Russians and Iranians. Despite the United States’s failed mission in the Near East, eastern Europe has had a very different outcome. Subsequent to the collapse of the Berlin Wall, former Soviet client states were immediately accepted by the west. The Baltic States, Poland, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania all joined the European Union within a decade of the fall of communism. Many of these states became NATO members as well. The international community provided aid and support toward these newly modern countries, helping to establish their governments and economies. Without this support, the transition to a democratic government would be significantly more challenging.

In conclusion, the right government is optimal for particular groups of people. In the Middle East, there are conflicting social problems that prohibit the establishment of democracy that have been perpetuated by American interference and European colonial borders. It has been proven that, though it may cause dissatisfaction among pro western liberals, authoritarianism is the most functional form of governance in the region. With the absence of a dictatorship there is a power vacuum that is created that must be filled and often is with terrorist groups. This occurred with the takeover of parts of Iraq and Syria by the Islamic State and Libya with a multitude of groups and factions. However, since Egypt was able to maintain a military dictatorship, the country has remained stable and relatively peaceful. The middle east is an example of democracy being an instrument for instability. Moreover, eastern Europe displayed opposite effects from democratic governance. Under authoritarian communist governments, the former Soviet republics as well as the Soviet client states of eastern Europe such as Poland or Hungary, were prohibited from advancing their civilizations with democracy. The economies of these states were stagnate and anti-government demonstrations were frequent until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Once these countries were exposed to developed, wealthy European ones, they tried replicating their governments. This resulted in remarkable economic growth and social satisfaction once

the democratic governments were established. Most of eastern Europe today is capitalistic and EU and NATO members. These countries have certainly come a long way in the past several decades, evolving from the seemingly ancient Eastern Bloc. The effects of the exportation of democracy are entirely dependent on the inhabitants of the country and in often cases can be an instrument for instability, however among western cultures, democracy is the most paramount pillar of society.
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