

The Reverse Emergent Properties of The International Democracy Promotion Regime in The Arab Middle East

İsmail Yaylacı

Abstract: Despite the dramatic increase in the international democracy promotion efforts toward the Arab Middle East in the period between the September 11, 2001 attacks and the Arab uprisings in 2010, the authoritarian regimes in the region have paradoxically become more entrenched. This paper tries to analyze this puzzling development by taking democracy promotion toward the Arab Middle East as an international regime. By examining the constitutive norms, procedures, and the institutions of this international democracy promotion regime, I argue that the weak character of the regime produced what I call 'reverse emergent properties'—contradictory systemic effects that cannot be reduced to its individual parts, in this case the individual democracy promotion initiatives.

Keywords: democracy promotion, Arab Middle East, democracy, authoritarianism, international regimes

Öz: 11 Eylül 2001 saldırıları ile 2010'da başlayan Arap ayaklanmaları arasındaki süreçte Ortadoğu'daki Arap ülkelerine yönelik uluslararası demokrasi yayma faaliyetlerinde çarpıcı bir artış olmasına rağmen bölgedeki otoriter rejimler paradoksal olarak kendilerini daha da tahkim ettiler. Bu makale bu muammalı gelişmeyi tahlil etmek için Arap Ortadoğusu'na yönelik demokrasi yayma faaliyetlerini bir uluslararası rejim olarak ele alıyor. Bu uluslararası demokrasi yayma rejiminin kurucu normlarını, prosedürlerini, ve kurumlarını değerlendiren makale, bu rejimin zayıf nitelikte olmasının 'ters beliren özellikler' olarak adlandırdığım, her bir demokrasi yayma girişimi anlamında tekil parçalara indirgenemeyen çelişik sistemik sonuçlar ürettiğini savunuyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: demokrasi yayma, Arap Ortadoğusu, demokrasi, otoriterlik, uluslararası rejimler

 Assist. Prof, Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf University, iyaylaci@fsm.edu.tr

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4217-4490>

 © İlmî Etüdler Derneği
DOI: 10.12658/M0724
insan & toplum, 2023; 13(4): 198-215
insanvetoplum.org

 Received: 04.08.2023
Revision: 22.08.2023
Accepted: 24.08.2023
Online first: 31.08.2023

Introduction

In the decade between the September 11 attacks in 2001 and the Arab uprisings in 2010, the international efforts to promote democracy in the Middle East skyrocketed. Informed by the conviction that the roots of insecurity in the West lies in the denial of peaceful channels of opposition in the Middle East, many scholars and policymakers rushed to point out the necessity of promoting democracy as a national security strategy. The U.S. National Security Strategy of 2002 and 2006 have posited democracy promotion in the Middle East as the quintessential component of the ‘war on terror.’ Various governments and non-governmental organizations have launched democracy promotion projects in the Middle East to drain the roots of political violence emanating from the region. However, despite the apparent increase in the reference to the necessity of democracy promotion and the rise in the amount of material and human resources devoted to that objective, autocratic regimes have become more firmly entrenched than before. (Diamond, 2008; Ottaway, 2009) Authoritarian regimes in the Middle East consolidated themselves much more in that period when international democracy promotion efforts skyrocketed. And the puzzling question is why? Why has an obvious increase in democracy promotion activities buttressed authoritarian regimes instead of weakening them? Can it have anything to do with the nature of the international democracy assistance efforts in the Arab Middle East?

This paper seeks to analyze this paradox of consolidated autocracies in the face of democracy promotion by turning to regime theory and asks whether it has something to do with the norms, procedures, and institutions regulating the field of democracy promotion in the Arab world. To do so, I investigate the nature and strength of the international regime of democracy promotion in the Arab Middle East—that is the institutionalized multilateral interactions within and among the Western and Arab states that affect the conditions and incentive structures for democratization. Surely, one can by no means claim that the international democracy promotion regime is the *cause* of lack of democracy or persistence of authoritarianism in the region. Rather, I argue that the weak structure of the international democracy promotion regime in the Middle East which derives from internal normative tensions and lack of enforcement capacity ends up producing a ‘reverse emergent property’—a systemic effect that cannot be reduced to its individual components—which paradoxically contributes to the stabilization of the existing autocratic regimes.

Examining the Arab authoritarianism paradox through considering democracy promotion as an international regime is far from an exercise in semantics. Rather, the question has significant theoretical and practical bearings. Theoretically, treating

democracy promotion as having a regional status speaks to the broader discussion over world ordering structures. Democracy promotion is one of the central ordering principles of liberal international order, at least since the end of the Cold War, therefore analyzing the international regime of democracy promotion in the 'hard case' of the Arab Middle East would provide insights about the operative mechanisms of that mode of governance. Second, from a more practical perspective, understanding the regime of international democracy promotion in the Arab Middle East helps us better account for how and why democracy promotion not only fails to foment democratization but, paradoxically, partakes in the persistence of authoritarianism.

Many scholars have dug into the causes of the enduring problem of the persistence of authoritarianism in the Middle East. In that vein, domestic material structures (economic development, rentier state), political culture (Islam, women's rights, social capital), and international dynamics (oil, economic dependency, Israeli-Arab conflict, foreign aid dynamics) have been considered as causes for the lack of democracy in the region. With the eruption of the Arab Uprisings in 2010, scholarly attention turned to the various dynamics of democratic transition such as the role of elites. (Linz & Stepan, 2013; Mercan & Kilavuz, 2017) Despite the rise in the scholarship to understand the value, impact and mechanisms of democracy promotion, there is hardly any systematic study looking at how the norms, institutions, and procedures of the international democracy promotion regime in the Arab Middle East affect the authoritarian regimes. Even more surprisingly, despite the international efforts, initiatives, and projects for supporting democratization in the Arab Middle East, it has not been considered as attaining a regional level of institutionalization. This becomes interesting when we see scholars talking about regional regimes of democracy promotion developed by the multilateral institutions of American Organization of States, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and Cooperation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. There is surprisingly no systematic study on the norms and procedures of the democracy promotion *regime* in the Middle East. This paper seeks to fill that gap by asking how considering democracy assistance in the Arab world as an international regime contribute to our understanding of why Arab autocracies persist.

As for the evidence, I look at the content of the democracy promotion programs of the multilateral inter-governmental institutions to explore the governing norms and procedures of the international democracy promotion regime. More specifically, I look at the European Union's Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and Union for the Mediterranean, US-initiated G-8 project of Middle East Partnership Initiative, and the UN Democracy Fund's and UN Development Program's works in the Arab

Middle East. In the scope of this analysis, I exclude two rather important sources of democracy promotion activities— individual countries and non-governmental organizations.¹

Taking Democracy Promotion as an International Regime: Norms, Procedures, and Institutions

It is now commonplace to talk about democracy promotion as a ‘growth industry’ and as a ‘sector’ composed of professional players in the form of contractors and subcontractors engaged in democracy supporting activities. (Burnell, 2000; Guilhot, 2005) What value added would it provide to our analysis if we think democracy promotion as an ‘international regime’? To put it directly, looking at democracy promotion as having a regional quality helps us better understand the systematic causes of the cumulative ‘reverse emergent properties’ of the field that continually produces suboptimal outcomes.

‘Emergent property’ as an analytical category is used in international relations theorizing to account for structural causation. The concept of ‘emergent property’ denotes an effect that is produced by the totality of the systemic whole in a way that cannot be reduced to its individual constituent parts. Philosophers use it to account for the relationship between brain and consciousness. Consciousness is an emergent property of the whole bodily system and brain functions that cannot be reduced to the bio-chemical operations of the brain. Similarly, I develop the term ‘reverse emergent property’ to argue that the international democracy promotion regime as a whole produces a structural effect—in this case, the reverse effect of further stabilization of autocracies—in a way that cannot be reduced to its constituent parts—here, the individual initiatives, institutions, projects, or norms.

To think through regime perspective is to ask what are the discernible “sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, values, and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge” in the particular issue-area of democracy promotion in the specific region of the Arab Middle East (Krasner, 1982). What are the norms and procedures that govern the actions of states and international institutions in their democracy promotion activities toward the region? When John

1 I exclude them in order to see whether there is a multilateral international regime in which states are actively cooperating with others on that particular question. But that exclusion comes at a big cost, which is to ignore the majority of the democracy assistance projects. Indeed, they are part and parcel of the international regime of democracy promotion yet are excluded here because of the preoccupation of the paper with the multilateral international regime.

Ruggie first coined the term ‘international regime’ he defined it as “a set of mutual expectations, rules and regulations, plans, organizational energies and financial commitments, which have been accepted by a group of states.” (Ruggie, 1975:570). The English School scholars, on the other hand, see regimes as pervasive in international politics so far so that we can talk about the existence of regimes in every substantive issue-area “where there is discernibly patterned behavior.” (Puchala and Hopkins, 1982:246, quoted in Donnelly 1986). Donnelly (1986), however, provides a fierce critique of the Grotian conception of regime as “discernibly patterned behavior” which, for him, means little more than “issue-area” or “political subsystem,” hence “wastes a useful term and pointlessly adds to our already overstocked store of jargon.” Similarly, Keohane suggests that to adopt Puchala and Hopkins’ definition of regimes “would be to make either ‘system’ or ‘regime’ a redundant term.” (Keohane, 1984:60) Regimes, Donnelly contends, would have no explanatory value if they are reduced to mere “description of apparent behavioral regularities.” (Donnelly, 1986:602). His own definition of international regime consists of “norms and decision-making procedures accepted by international actors to regulate an issue area” (Donnelly, 1986:602). However, his definition of regimes almost exclusively refers to legitimate ‘constraints’ imposed by norms and procedures on actors, which fails to put the necessary emphasis on the ‘productive’ dimension of regimes. Regimes, just as discourses, are productive of norms as they are products of norms. Hence, looking at the institutionalized practices of actors—here conceptualized as ‘behavioral regularities’—is also of great significance because it enables us to see how regimes produce practices even when they are not created exclusively to constrain behavior. This is particularly pertinent to the democracy promotion regime in the Middle East since, as I argue below, it is a regime defined not in terms of its constraints on behavior—due to lack of deepened institutionalization and legalization, conflict between norms, lack of consensus over procedures and strategies—but rather through its productive dimension, that is through its ability to ground various (and sometimes conflicting) actions within a discourse.

The international regime literature usually tends to take one international treaty as the authoritative text defining the normative core of the regime in question.² (Chayes and Chayes, 1993; Franck, 1992; Hasenclever et.al., 2004). It is hard to point out an umbrella treaty for Arab democracy promotion regime. We have declarations such as the Universal Declaration on Democracy in 1997 and regional umbrella

2 Examples include The Vienna Convention and the subsequent protocols defining the core of ozone regime and the Quadripartite Agreement defining the core of the Berlin regime. See (Hasenclever et.al, 2004:10)

treaties such as the Santiago Commitment for Latin America and the Copenhagen Criteria for the EU countries. Yet, as Muller (1989:282) points out, the concept of regime is not restricted to the study of treaties, rather, it enables scholars to go beyond treaties to “envisage a ‘functional whole’ which might be composed of a rather heterogeneous set of (formal and informal) agreements, practices, and institutions.” (Hasenclever et.al., 2004: 10). In other words, regimes might vary in terms of their degree of institutionalization and mechanisms of interaction, which may or may not involve legalization.

Donnelly (1986) further argues that regimes require limited renunciation of national sovereign authority in a specific issue-area in order to decrease the uncertainties created by international anarchy. In the international democracy promotion regime, promoter states hardly negotiate their sovereign authority, while the authoritarian governments at the receiving end often consider their sovereignty to be undermined by democracy promotion. At any rate, neither external constraints nor the negotiation of sovereignty captures the core of the international regime of democracy promotion in the Middle East. This is primarily because of the ‘problem structure’ of the democracy promotion game which is different from the problems of cooperation as in the mixed motives-games and problems of collaboration as in the Prisoners’ Dilemma games. Hence, it is more apt to view the regime of democracy promotion not as a problem of constraining behavior to achieve ‘cooperation under anarchy’ but as a productive regime that engenders, and is a product of, practices and discourses. Then, what are the norms, institutions, and procedures of the international regime of democracy promotion in the Middle East?

Norms

The conception of norms in international regimes vary. While constructivist scholars view norms as “standards of appropriate behavior for a given identity” (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Katzenstein, 1996), rationalist scholars tend to take norms simply as “standards of behavior, whether adopted on grounds of self-interest or otherwise.” (Keohane, 1984). Yet, Keohane still leaves open the possibility for some regimes to contain norms and principles that are justified on the basis of values that might transcend self-interest and that are “regarded obligatory on moral grounds by governments.” (Keohane, 1984).

What constitutes the core norms that define the international regime of democracy promotion in the Arab world? In a broader sense, the ‘liberal consensus’ over the content of modernization and development defines the normative content of the

whole array of democracy promotion activities (Guilhot, 2005). This particular interpretation of modernization theory shares the core tenets of liberalism, such as the commitment to the universality of human rights and electoral representation, the belief in unfettered markets in creating the economic conditions for democratic society, and the centrality of liberal civil society in instituting democracy. In his discussion of EU democracy promotion activities, Youngs (2005) argue that Europeans advocate political reform “as part of a general process of social and economic modernization.” The same is true for the US-led and G-8 adopted project of Middle East Partnership Initiative, as well as various UN initiatives (Diamond, 2005; White, 2000). The liberal consensus within the democracy promotion regime is evident in the almost complete lack of debate in policy papers and state and inter-state declarations about the ‘content’ of democracy. The internal differences within the democracy promotion community is not on the liberal nature of democracy—as being part of the broader liberal modernization—but on the specific mechanisms and strategies of democratization.

Dwelling on sociological institutionalism’s insights (Meyer et.al., 1997), one can argue that democracy promotion agenda is defined, shaped, and legitimated through the norms of the ‘global culture’ of which democracy is now an integral part, as expressed in the Universal Declaration on Democracy in 1997: “Democracy is a universally recognized ideal as well as a goal, which is based on common values shared by peoples throughout the *world community* irrespective of cultural, political, social and economic differences.”³ It is necessary to keep in mind that my argument does not necessarily posit that democracy as a global norm effectively governs state practices, yet, it argues that democracy is discursively constructed as a “global norm” (McFaul 2004), a “global priority” (Schraeder, 2002), the “organizing principle of the new international order” (Guilhot, 2005:1), an integral part of ‘global culture’, a universal right, a global entitlement, and a requirement of international law (Franck, 1992). Hence, I take democracy-promotion as an intersubjectively constructed norm which defines what constitutes an appropriate standard of behavior and ‘normal politics’ under liberal international order.

However, the Arab democracy promotion regime is characterized by strong internal tensions among liberal norms which undermine its coherence and strength. Three intertwined tensions stand as central, which are those between i) liberalism and democracy, ii) secularism and religious politics, and iii) stability and change. On the

3 Universal Declaration on Democracy, declaration adopted without a vote by the Inter-Parliamentary Council at its 161st session in Cairo, September 16, 1997. <http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/161-dem.htm>

challenging task of promoting democracy in the Arab world, the scholarly and policy discourses point out the ‘dangers’ and ‘discontents’ of democracy (Elshtain, 2007). Calling on “to discuss, critically and candidly, the tensions and complexities involved” in promoting democracy in the region, Elshtain (2007) argues that democracy is not a “sacrosanct principle”, but just a way to guarantee human dignity and freedom. For her, the “perennial conundrum” of democracy promotion in the region is the risk of coming to power of “Islamist radicals,” hence, democracy promotion should avoid being formulaic and automatic and avoid using the language of ‘will of the people’ which, for her, tends to promote intolerance. In the same vein, some state their preference for a liberal autocracy over an illiberal democracy (Zakaria 1997, Lieven 2005, Brumberg 2005). The second tension between secularism and religious politics can be treated as a subset of the first problematic. E. Shakhman Hurd (2007) argues that secularism as a discourse assumes a norm-like position that further complicates the status of the mass political movements mobilized around religiously inspired ideals. Elshtain (2007) sees these movements as a “threat represented by the totalitarian aspirations and realities of Islamist radicalism” who aim to “turn a world religion into an all-encompassing, violent ideology.” Hence, embedded secularism of liberalism constitutes another factor that further complicates democracy promotion. Furthermore, there is also a tension between the desire to keep the status quo while promoting democratization. Sudden democratic change is normatively devalued as destabilizing (Huntington, 2006), causing further conflicts (Mansfield and Snyder, 2005), bringing illiberal forces to power (Diamond, 2005; Zakaria, 1997) and harming U.S. strategic interests in the region (Takeyh and Gvosdev 2004). Carothers’s (1999) argument that security-related and economic interests have often outweighed or undermined the U.S. interest in democracy highlights this preference for stability over dramatic change on the part of international donors.

Procedures

I argue that the defining procedural rule of international democracy promotion in the Middle East is gradualism. Richard Youngs observes that it has been standard in the democracy promotion community to warn that political change should be gradual. Carothers, being a foremost practitioner and theorist of democracy promotion, problematizes what he calls the “sequentialist fallacy” within gradualism, which suggests that democracy can be possible only after structural preconditions are met. The implication for the democracy assistance regime of that gradualist-sequentialist orientation is the deliberate abstention from vigorously addressing the problem of participation and contestation in the targeted polities. Part of the reason for that abstention is the fear of confrontation with the host governments to avoid bureaucratic

blockages within the political system so that the democracy promotion community can reach out the grassroots actors of democratization (Carothers et.al, 2004).

There is no consensus among scholars and practitioners over what democracy promotion entails in terms of mechanisms and strategies. For extreme gradualists, any foreign aid to promote some form of development is also a form of democracy promotion since nation building, establishment of a free market, building a liberal civil society themselves are preconditions of democratization (Burnell, 2007). Carothers, on the other hand, rejects that overstretched definition and contends that only explicitly political aid that push for 'political' reform can be regarded as democracy promotion. This lack of consensus over the definition, scope, means, and strategies of democracy promotion undermines the strength of the democracy promotion regime since it has immediate actual ramifications in terms of how democracy is to be promoted and what constitutes a compliance and non-compliance with the norm. One such divide is between whether it is necessary to resist dictators, and whether it is sufficient to support democrats. Another divide is about what to do with Islamist oppositional groups in the Arab countries since they challenge the norm of secularism.

In stressing the longevity of the process of democratization, gradualism sometimes serves as the discursive shield against any criticism of 'double standards' when international actors' deeds conflict with their rhetoric. Indeed, many of the critics of democracy promotion policies use that language of gradualism to justify more support for, or engagement with, the Arab autocracies. (Lieven, 2005; McFaul, 2006 Takeyh and Gvosdev, 2004) Usually, this gradualism takes as its strategy various instruments such soft power, peer pressure, cooperative partnership, and persuasion. (Youngs, 2005)

However, as many critics point out, these indirect strategies within the international democracy promotion regime in the Middle East fail to produce "sufficient and sustained" democratization since they do not directly confront the "real institutional problems" but instead "dampen citizen pressure for changes from within societies and mislead outsiders into thinking change is occurring," which have been "appropriated and redirected by adaptable semi-authoritarian regimes to perpetuate their rule." (Multilateral Strategies to Promote Democracy, 2003:29)

Institutions

The most prominent institutionalized multilateral programs within the international Arab democracy promotion regime are European Union's Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and Union for the Mediterranean, the US-initiated and G-8 supported

Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the UN's Democracy Fund and Development Program's projects.

Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Euro-Med) and Union for the Mediterranean

Popularly known as the Barcelona Process since its initiation in 1995, the Euro-Med has been the first and most extensive policy opening of the EU toward the Arab Middle East, with 10 members of the Arab League. The Barcelona Declaration of 1995 laid down the foundations of the new regional partnership in its goals of "achieving peace, stability, and growth in the Mediterranean Partner Countries," and identified three partnership areas: working for a "common area of peace and stability based on respect for human rights and democracy", gradual establishment of a free trade area, and cultural exchanges between civil societies.⁴ In 2005 the Euro-Med partners mentioned "advancing democracy and human rights through stronger political dialogue and cooperation" as a "critical priority" in their five-year program. The funds devoted for this partnership is by no means insignificant. Between 1995-2006, the EU supported the Partnership with 16 billion Euros, and for the period of 2007-2013, approximately 12 billion Euros are made available in funding by the EU. However, the amount allocated for democracy projects has been 10 million Euros per year (Youngs, 2005).⁵ Even this relatively small democracy budget has been spent on initiatives that were only indirectly related to democratization such as environmental and service delivery associations, small business development, and cultural cooperation projects (Youngs, 2005). None of these projects invoked political conditionality, and most of them were conducted in the form of funding a European-based NGO for information-gathering and monitoring the country in question. Despite being a foremost practitioner within the EU-democracy promotion policies in the Middle East, Youngs (2005) concludes that the limitations of the EU programs "militated against even more modest positive impact."

Union for the Mediterranean, on the other hand, builds on, but not replaces, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was re-launched in 2008 as the Union for the Mediterranean at the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean. The European Commission for External Relations explains the

4 The partner countries of the Barcelona process are also part of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) that was developed in 2004. The ENP operates on a bilateral basis through Action Plans that are tailored to the particularities and specific needs of the partner country in question.

5 This is the amount spent between 1996-1999. Also, the amounts spent by individual countries are not insignificant. For instance UK allocated 7 million pounds, The Danish government introduced 15 million Euros, Sweden committed 5 million Euros for democracy promotion.

rationale for the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean as increasing the level of strategic relationship between the EU and its southern neighbors and offering a “more balanced governance, increased visibility to citizens and a commitment to tangible, regional and transnational project.” However, within the six areas the Union for the Mediterranean identify as the ‘priority projects’ there is no mention to democracy and political reform. Within the Union for the Mediterranean, the emphasis on democracy in European engagement with the Arab states has been even more compromised. That is why Richard Youngs (2005) argues that in its current ‘selective,’ ‘limited,’ and ‘cautious’ form, EU democracy promotion initiatives fail to deliver the “sophisticated holistic gradualism” that it aspires to.

Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)

Relying on the 2002 Arab Human Development Report, the U.S. announced the creation of the MEPI to promote entrepreneurship, encourage free trade, fund the education of Muslim girls, and support citizen participation. The initiative was adopted by the G-8 in its 2004 summit in Sea Island, Georgia. The G-8 Summit came up with a handful of specific measures including the “Broader Middle East and North Africa Foundation for Democracy” to which Europeans as well as Americans would contribute, a “Broader Middle East and North Africa Democracy Assistance Group” for coordinating and sharing information about election aid, transparency, and furtherance of civil society, a “Broader Middle East and North Africa Literacy Corps” and a microfinance pilot project to fund new small businesses in the region in order to expand the middle class for a consolidated democracy, and a “Democracy Assistance Dialogue” that would strengthen democratic institutions, coordinate and share information on democracy programs and sponsor exchange programs with the G-8 countries. Like Euro-Med, MEPI proposed promoting democracy and good governance, building a knowledge society and expanding economic opportunities.

However, the initial enthusiasm to promote democracy within MEPI quickly waned because of the coming to power of parties such as Hamas and Hezbollah, and the strengthening of electoral prowess of political groups such as Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan. The fervent discourse of ‘democracy promotion’ in the Middle East gave way to more sustained emphasis on gradualism as a way to avoid the ‘political costs’ of elections in these countries. This watering down has been emblematic of the weakness of the democracy promotion regime and reflective of the internal normative tensions between state interests in the status quo and ideals of political change, and between secular liberalism and Islamist electoral participation.

The United Nations Initiatives

As the universal multilateral international organization, UN institutions also devised democracy promotion initiatives in the Arab region. The Inter-Parliamentary Union's Universal Declaration on Democracy in 1997 serves as a powerful reference point for UN democracy promotion activities and hopes for future legalization in that direction. The UN efforts to promote democracy focuses largely on electoral assistance through organization, conduct, supervision and verification of the electoral process, coordination of international observers, support for national observers, and technical assistance (White, 2000). The procedures UN operates through are also gradualist in that it seeks to transform the structural conditions for democratization. The UNDP's "democratic governance" initiatives similarly dwell on the fundamental tenets of liberal modernization view which comprises, in this case, decentralization and local governance, modernization of justice sector, and modernization and strengthening of legislative bodies. Hence, its democratic governance goals in the Middle East are strengthening core government institutions, enhancing accountable institutions, and working with the local partners. In 2000 UNDP placed democratic governance at the heart of its development cooperation program, attaining more expertise in the field and channeling sources in that direction. The UNDP's annual Arab Human Development Reports since 2002 have proved more influential than many of its projects since they have formed the basis of MEPI. The Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR) under the UNDP engages in promoting policy dialogue and strategic partnerships, capacity building, knowledge sharing among government officials, civil society organizations, academics and donor agencies to promote the pillars of good governance including rule of law, transparency and accountability, participation and human rights.

The UN Democracy Fund (UNDEF) also carries out projects globally that focuses principally on civil society. The institution's budget is allocated for projects on democratic dialogue and constitutional processes, civil society empowerment, human rights and fundamental freedoms, civic education, electoral support, and political parties, accountability, transparency, integrity, and access to information. Roughly 15% of the UNDEF projects were carried out in the Arab world. The organization arranges roundtables and workshops in various Arab countries as part of the consciousness-raising efforts in democracy promotion.

The Strength of the International Arab Democracy Promotion Regime and Its Reverse Emergent Properties

The democracy promotion regimes are “promotional regimes” which aim at making the target population accept or enforce certain international norms through “information exchange, promotion, or assistance, and perhaps even weak monitoring of international guidelines.” (Donnelly, 1986). Yet, Donnelly’s observation made in mid-1980s needs some modification. Given the new international institutional practices, we are now able to think of international promotional regimes having implementation and even enforcement qualities. EU’s membership requirements based on the quality of democracy (known as Copenhagen Criteria), various international institution’s conditionality measures for aid (i.e. World Bank), the impact of regional institutions such as Organization of American States and the European Union using measures stronger than ‘promotional’ activities for pushing for democratization are cases in point. Yet, one is hard pressed to pinpoint any multilateral institution promoting democracy in the Arab Middle East that uses measures stronger than assistance. International democracy promotion regime in the Middle East lacks the capacity of ‘implementation’ and ‘enforcement’ that we observe in other ‘stronger’ regimes (Donnelly, 1986).

I operationalize the strength of a regime through its normative coherence and its degree of institutionalization, understood as the ability to monitor and enforce its norms. International Arab democracy promotion regime in the decade between September 11 attacks and the eruption of Arab Uprisings scores low in both accounts, and hence it is by all measures a ‘weak’ promotional regime. Normative incoherence manifests itself in the form of both inconsistencies between individual norms and in vagueness that allows for inconsistent interpretation and action (Donnelly, 1986). As discussed above, not only there is a conflict between liberal norms but also a lack of consensus over what constitutes a breach of these norms. For instance, when the Egyptian regime violently suppressed the opposition in 2007, jailed the opposition candidates a few days before the elections, physically prevented people from going to voting centers, and legally prevented most of the opposition from running in the elections, the international democracy promoters were quite hesitant to criticize it. These compromising attitudes that reflected the normative tensions within the regime (between stability and change, and liberalism and democracy) were easily legitimized through reference to one side of the conflicting norms and the gradualist procedures.

In addition to the normative incoherence, the degree of institutionalization is also low. Monitoring compliance with democratic standards faces various challenges.

International election monitoring has been the foremost institution of monitoring in the Arab democracy promotion regime, however, its normative incoherence and vagueness radically undermine its efficacy in producing compliance. For instance, while the Egyptian elections of 2005 was marked by high levels of fraud, it has passed almost uncriticized. The Palestinian elections of 2007, on the other hand, which was generally seen as one of the cleanest elections in the Arab world, has been practically nullified because of its outcome. That silence toward the Mubarak regime and the nullification of the Palestinian elections signaled support to the authoritarian regimes in Egypt and elsewhere and was viewed as a testament to how democracy could easily be sacrificed if it did not fit well with other normative commitments and/or material interests.

This also speaks to the enforcement capacity of the regime. Thinking in terms of the manipulation of rewards and punishments for securing compliance, apart from the incorporation of some democracy clauses in trade agreements that could trigger sanctions, there is only little pressure from the EU for political reform. (Youngs, 2005) Almost none of the aid given through the institutions of the democracy promotion regime is explicitly conditioned on democratic performance. Moreover, the lack of criticism or shaming of the autocratic regimes is coupled by a “high indulgence” in appraising the very small steps taken by the incumbents to still the wind of the opposition as in places such as Jordan, Morocco, and Algeria. (Youngs, 2005) The support that the Mubarak regime gets, and the opposition Hamas government receives from international community signals to the authoritarian incumbents that they can remain safe as long as they cooperate in key geostrategic issues such as the security of oil and gas, the Israeli-Palestinian situation, and the war on terror.

In that sense, one could ask whether the international democracy promotion regime really meets Krasner’s criteria of convergence of expectations and predictability. The answer would be yes, but in a reverse way. The incoherent norms and weak enforcement capacity creates a reverse emergent property of paradoxically signaling support for the authoritarian regimes. In other words, one finds within the international Arab democracy promotion regime a behavioral regularity and normative vagueness in a way that enables prediction of future behavior in the form of accommodation of non-compliance to democratic norms.

Gary Campbill (2003) argues that the democracy promotion projects in the Middle East in the post-9/11 era are not different from other democracy promotion initiatives which provide neither rewards nor punishments for pushing towards democracy. Most of the Arab states first opposed the MEPI, but after realizing

that non-compliance meets no serious sanctions, they became involved in it for two purposes: first, in order not to have a bad reputation and to gain international legitimacy within the international society, and second to preempt and control the transformation or “bleeding off the accumulating pressure for real political change” (Carothers and Ottaway, 2004:3) through cosmetic reforms. In practice, it had some positive repercussions such as the lifting of the state of emergency in Egypt that had been in rule since 1981, yet they remained superficial changes as their effects were nullified through domestic institutional engineering.

Legalization is also a dimension of regime strength related to the degree of institutionalization. Although it is not a sine qua non for a regime to attain strength, legalization of the norms and procedures within a regime represent sedimentation of the enshrined principles. Globally, UN’s Inter-Parliamentary Union’s Universal Declaration on Democracy—that was later endorsed by the UN General Assembly—is the boldest attempt toward creating a reference point for future legalization. Before the Declaration on Democracy, in 1994, the UN issued a Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections in which it confirmed that “in any state the authority of the government can derive only from the will of the people as expressed in genuine, free and fair elections.” Also, the UN Secretary General’s Agenda for Democratization that he presented in 1996 to the 51st session of the UN General Assembly serves as a reference for the Declaration. The Declaration on Democracy principally based itself on the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979). However, these attempts to provide a deeper institutional architecture for democratization have not met an enthusiastic constituency. None of the American and European democracy promotion initiatives take these declarations as a reference point to build upon.

Conclusion

Tamara C. Wittes (2004) argues that the international democracy promotion policies have failed to realize their stated aims since the aid and donations that are given at an intergovernmental basis “have the effect of subsidizing the Arab governments’ attempt to build a kinder, gentler autocracy.” This is the paradox that I try to analyze in this paper. The resources poured into promoting democracy in the Arab Middle East in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks have ended up strengthening the autocratic regimes, albeit with a gentler face. I argue that this is for the large part

due to the weak structure of the international democracy promotion regime in the Arab world which created reverse emergent properties—the paradoxical situation that individual international efforts to push for democratization ends up creating the opposite systemic effect of entrenching autocracies. This reverse emergent property is acutely captured in Burnell's (2000) observation that in the democracy promotion field “the whole amounts to significantly less than the sum of the parts” for it is so diverse and fragmented. Although international democracy promotion regime is not a coherent whole, its structural effects amount to less than the sum of its parts.

The analytical value-added of the regime theory is that it enables us to see not only the islands of relative order within anarchy but also the structured effects it produces. Reverse emergent properties of the Arab democracy promotion regime arise as a structural effect produced by the totality of the norms, procedures, and institutions of the regime, without being reducible to its individual constituents. In that sense, this paper also speaks to the recent discussions over the value of taking consequences into the ethical calculus in international politics (Price, 2008; Sikkink, 2008). The relation between burgeoning democracy promotion efforts and ever strengthening of authoritarian regimes should be a concern for IR scholars and democracy promotion practitioners, and further research should push us to problematize more deeply the broader material and ideational structures that make this bewildering paradox possible.

References

- Brumberg, D., Carothers, T., Hawthorne, A., & Ottaway, M. (2002). Democratic Mirage in the Middle East. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Policy Brief*.
- Brumberg, D. (2007). Democracy and Security in the Middle East. *Democracy and Civil Society*, 4(2), Spring.
- Burnell, P. (2000). Democracy Assistance: The State of the Discourse. In P. Burnell (Ed.), *Democracy Assistance: International Co-operation for Democratization*. Frank Cass & Co Ltd.
- Burnell, P. (2000). Democracy Assistance: Origins and Organizations. In P. Burnell (Ed.), *Democracy Assistance: International Co-operation for Democratization*. Frank Cass & Co Ltd.
- Burnell, P. (2000). Democracy Assistance: The State of the Art. In P. Burnell (Ed.), *Democracy Assistance: International Co-operation for Democratization*. Frank Cass & Co Ltd.
- Burnell, P., & Calvert, P. (2005). Promoting Democracy Abroad. *Democratization*, 12(4), 433-438.
- Carothers, T., & Ottaway, M. (2004). The Greater Middle East Initiative: Off to a False Start. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Policy Brief*.
- Carothers, T. (2005). A Better Way to Support Middle East Reform. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Policy Brief*, 33, 158.
- Carothers, T. (1994). The Democracy Nostrum. *World Policy Journal*, Fall, 52.
- Carothers, T. (1999). Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve. *The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Policy Brief*.

- Carothers, T., & Ottaway, M. (2005). The New Democracy Imperative. In T. Carothers & M. Ottaway (Eds.), *Uncharted Journey: Promoting Democracy in the Middle East. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Policy Brief*.
- Carothers, T. (2007). How Democracies Emerge: The 'Sequencing' Fallacy. *Journal of Democracy*, 18(1).
- Carothers, T. (2009). Democracy Assistance: Political vs. Developmental? *Journal of Democracy*, 20(1).
- Carothers, T. (2009). Stepping Back From Democratic Pessimism. *Carnegie Endowment Papers*.
- Chayes, A., & Chayes, A. H. (1993). On Compliance. *International Organization*, 47(2), 175-205.
- Diamond, L., & Marlino, L. (2005). *Assessing the Quality of Democracy*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Diamond, L. (2008). The Democratic Rollback: The Resurgence of the Predatory State. *Foreign Affairs*, March/April.
- Donnelly, J. (1986). International Human Rights: A Regime Analysis. *International Organization*, 40(3), 599-642.
- Elshtain, J. B. (2007-2008). A Quarter Century of Promoting Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 18(4), October.
- Finnemore, M., & Sikkink, K. (1998). International Norm Dynamics and Political Change. *International Organization*, 52(4), Autumn.
- Franck, T. M. (1992). The Emerging Right to Democratic Governance. *American Journal of International Law*, 86.
- Gambill, G. C. (2003). Explaining the Arab Democracy Deficit, Part II: American Policy. *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, 5(8-9).
- Gambill, G. C. (2004). Jumpstarting Arab Reform: The Bush Administration's Greater Middle East Initiative. *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, 6(6-7).
- Guilhot, N. (2005). *The Democracy Makers: Human Rights and International Order*. Columbia University Press.
- Gvosdev, N. K., & Takeyh, R. (2003). Democratic Impulses versus Imperial Interests: America's New Mid-East Conundrum. *Orbis*, 47(3), Summer.
- Hasenclever, A., Mayer, P., & Rittberger, V. (2004). *Theories of International Regimes*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hurd, E. S. (2008). *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*. Princeton University Press.
- Katzenstein, P. (1996). *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identities in World Politics*. Columbia University Press.
- Keohane, R. (1984). *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. Princeton University Press.
- Krasner, S. D. (1982). Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables. *International Organization*, 36(2), Spring.
- Krauthammer, C. (2004). Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World. *American Enterprise Institute*.
- Krauthammer, C. (2004). In Defense of Democratic Realism. *The National Interest*, 77(Fall), 15-25.
- Lieven, A. (2006). Wolfish Wilsonians: Existential Dilemmas of the Liberal Internationalists. *Orbis*, 50(2), Spring.
- Linz, J. J., & Stepan, A. C. (2013). *Democratization Theory and the "Arab Spring"* [2013]. *Journal of Democracy*. <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/democratization-theory-and-the-arab-spring/>
- Mansfield, E. D. D., & Snyder, J. (2007). *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War*. MIT Press.
- McFaul, M. (2004-05). Democracy Promotion as a World Value. *The Washington Quarterly*, 28(1), Winter, 147-163.

- Mercan, M. H., & Kilavuz, M. T. (2017). Tunus'ta Demokratikleşme ve Elit Teorisi. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 14(55), Article 55. <https://doi.org/10.33458/uidergisi.513515>
- Meyer, J., et al. (1997). World Society and the Nation-State. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 103(1).
- Multilateral Strategies to Promote Democracy. (2003). Retrieved August 28, 2023, from <https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/media/series/205/multilateral-strategies-to-promote-democracy>
- Ottaway, M. (2009). Middle East Democracy Promotion Is Not a One-way Street. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Policy Brief*.
- Price, R. (2008). *Moral Limit and Possibility in World Politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ruggie, J. (1975). International responses to technology: Concepts and trends. *International Organization*, 29(3), 557-583. doi:10.1017/S0020818300031696
- Takeyh, R., & Gvosdev, N. K. (2003). Democratic Impulses versus Imperial Interests: America's New Mid-East Conundrum. *Orbis*, 47(3), Spring.
- Schraeder, P. J. (2002). Making the World Safe for Democracy? In P. J. Schraeder (Ed.), *Exporting Democracy: Rhetoric vs. Reality*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Schraeder, P. J. (2002). Promoting an International Community of Democracies. In P. J. Schraeder (Ed.), *Exporting Democracy: Rhetoric vs. Reality*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Schraeder, P. J. (2003). The State of the Art in International Democracy Promotion: Results of a Joing European-North American Research Network. *Democratization*, 10(2), Summer, 21-44.
- Sikkink, K. (2008). The Role of Consequences, Comparison, and Counterfactuals in Constructivist Ethical Thought. In R. Price (Ed.), *Moral Limit and Possibility in World Politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- White, N. D. (2000). The United Nations and Democracy Assistance: Developing Practice within a Constitutional Framework. In P. Burnell (Ed.), *Democracy Assistance: International Co-operation for Democratization*. Frank Cass & Co Ltd.
- Wittes, T. C. (2004). The Middle East Partnership Initiative: Progress, Problems and Prospects. *Saban Center Middle East Memo 5*, Saban Center for Middle East Policy.
- Youngs, R. (2003). European Policies for Middle East Reform: A Ten Point Action Plan. *The Foreign Policy Centre New Directions in Global Thinking The Civility Project Working Paper no. 1*.
- Youngs, R. (2004). Europe and the Greater Middle East Initiative. *Arab Reform Journal*, 2(4), April.
- Youngs, R. (2005). Europe's Uncertain Pursuit of Middle Eastern Reform. In T. Carothers & M. Ottaway (Eds.), *Uncharted Journey: Promoting Democracy in the Middle East*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Youngs, R. (2006). Democracy and Security in the Middle East. *FRIDE Working Paper 21*, March.
- Zakaria, F. (1997). The Rise of Illiberal Democracy. *Foreign Affairs*, 76(6), 22-43.