

## Chapter 9

# Democracy, Theocracy, or Fascism

Nation building in the Middle East has, since the second Iraqi invasion, become a much discussed issue in the United States. Middle Eastern specialists write books, get on television, and have a big audience of passionate and puzzled inquirers.

We might summarize the core of this discussion with this simple question: How can an oil-rich nation become a functioning democracy without falling prey to either a theocratic Muslim medievalism or a secular dictatorship composed of another power-hungry minority or ruling family?

This simple question is made more complex by the planet-wide relations of oil-producing nations with their oil consumers. The United States, the European Union, China, India, and others have been willing, and may continue to be willing, to be supportive of any secular dictatorship or Muslim theocracy that is willing to favor them as oil customers. A fully democratic Middle Eastern nation that chooses to put its own people first or that partners with the “wrong” oil consumers may incite the wrath of those oil consumers who feel that their interests are not being served.

For example, will the U.S. tolerate an Iraqi government that wants to favor the European Union and the euro in its oil dealings? In the not quite hidden thinking of many U.S. neo-conservatives, this oil threat was the key crime that transformed Saddam Hussein from a friendly authoritarian leader into a horrible tyrant. Will a U.S. government be willing to remove its troops from Iraq (I am writing in February 2005) if a democracy emerges there that is not also a client-nation of the United States?

These strong planetary influences extend beyond Iraq. Will a Chinese government tolerate any changes in the theocratic Iranian government that threatens its oil deals with that nation? Will the U.S. be willing to support a democratization of Saudi Arabia if that entails a threat to its oil supply? Will the European Union support any arrangement that threatens its oil supplies? India, Russia, and many other places apply similar pressures.

“Democracy,” when it is used in this complex context, is a word that is stretched this way and that according to who is using it to argue for what. We who wish to think clearly and fairly must avoid defining “democracy” to mean any “stable” government that supports U.S. interests. Let us define democracy for a Middle Eastern nation in the same way that we define it for the United States or any other so-called “established democracy.” Let us assume that democracy means the full commitment of a full majority of a nation’s citizens to these two basic directions: (1) government of the people, by the people, and for the people, and (2) government with firmly enforced law and order carried out in obedience to a constitution that protects all minorities from a violent majority and protects the majority from all violent minorities. By “full commitment” to these two directions I mean a commitment that is stronger than the remaining remnants of theocracy, racism, and anti-feminine or anti-gay sentiments.

Such democracy may seem like a tall order. It may seem that learning democracy might take many generations, but this is not true. Democracy can be learned by some people in about twenty minutes – maybe several years for others. Learning democracy is like a person from a stone age culture learning to drive a car. It does not take that person a whole generation to do that. Becoming a democracy is almost like taking off one coat and putting on another. Anyone can do it. The difficulty is that many people simply do not want democracy. And this truth applies to the people of the United States no less than to the people of Iraq or anywhere else.

The struggle for democracy in the U.S. is parallel with the struggle for democracy in Iraq. In Iraq there are two groups who are opposed to democracy: (1) the secular Bathists who want to return to a monarchy that favors their interests and (2) the Muslim theocrats who want to force everyone in their culture into a medieval mold. In Saudi Arabia we can find the same two groups: (1) the semi-secular ruling family and (2) the Muslim medievalists of whom Osama Bin Laden is one. In the United States we also have two similar groups – groups who actually oppose democracy even though they claim to support it. In the U.S. our theocratic medievalists are popularly called “the Religious Right.” Our monarchical secularists do not have a popular name, but let’s call them “the Corporatists.”

The Corporatists are those who favor giving the U.S. corporations dictatorial powers over every aspect of the economy, the culture, and the polity. This baseline commitment is rationalized as a democratic position, but it is actually opposition to democracy masquerading as a democratic option. The Corporatists have been so successful with this masquerade that they have been able to capture an entire political party and collude with the Religious Right in putting together (in 2004) a slight majority that controls all three branches of a once democratic government. Of course, some Republicans are not thoroughgoing Corporatists; they are honestly and simply committed to fiscal discipline, law and order, free-enterprise, strong defense, even campaign finance reform, or some other aspect of “good” government that they feel should be part of a healthy democracy. But these “democratic Republicans” are currently controlled by and colluding with the full-blown Corporatists who rule the Republican Party. And the Democratic Party is also laced with Corporatist influences. The so-called “Centrist Democrats” are the Corporatist wing of the Democratic Party. They are those who seek to win elections by colluding enough with U.S. corporations to raise money enough and influence enough to wedge their other somewhat more democratic sentiments into positions of power. The Democratic Party is in a deep struggle whether to remain moderate Corporatists or to become thoroughgoing supporters of government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

In order to further understand Corporatism, we must be clear about what full-blown Corporatism looks like. Adolph Hitler and Mussolini were full-blown Corporatists. Full-blown Corporatism is quite plainly what we have called “fascism.” Why must this be true? It is true because the corporation is a monarchical organization in its basic structure. It is ruled from the top down, and this “top” is an assemblage of wealth that has one and only one bottom line; to protect and increase the wealth of its owners. It does not matter that millions of small investors have chosen to buy into these money-making machines. Those who control and manage these wealth-producing operations are antidemocratic forces. Some have called corporations “the last remnants of medieval feudalism.” As long as these little monarchies were indeed “little” in comparison with the democracy governments that regulated them, democracy could triumph in the overall flow of historical outcomes. But once these monarchies became so huge and so powerful and so clever in using their power to sway populations and to buy and control democratic governments, Corporatism as a ruling social force arose within the house of U.S. democracy.

Saddam Hussein and his Bathist Party were a form of Corporatism, a full-blown fascism supported by oil wealth. The ruling family of Saudi Arabia is also a form of Corporatism, another full-blown fascism supported by oil wealth. The United States is not at this time a full-blown fascism, for democratic forces still have sufficient power to restrain some of the excesses that Corporatism will assume if not restrained. Nevertheless, if we were to talk about percentages of the population who are committed to full-blown Corporatism, the United States is not all that different from Iraq. Let’s assume that both nations have 15 or 20 percent of their

population who are clearly dedicated to Corporatism and are willing to do almost anything to acquire, maintain, and expand power for this perspective. Both nations also have another significant percentage who are theocratic medievalists – in the U.S. case, theocratic Christians and the case of Iraq, theocratic Muslims. The number of theocratic Muslims in Saudi Arabia is much larger than Iraq, even larger than Iran where theocracy currently reigns. Nevertheless, in all three of these oil-rich West Asian nations, a third significant body of people exist – people who are committed to democracy or are potentially willing to support democracy.

The extent of this democratic support is hidden by the fact that many of these people are willing to support, or at least not oppose, whoever is in power – secular dictators, theocrats, or democratic leaders. Some are willing to support secular dictators if they are opposing the theocrats they hate more. Some are willing to support theocrats if they are opposing the secular dictators they hate more. But these same people are also willing to support democratic leaders if those leaders can produce protection from these other two forces and provide opportunity for decision-making participation as well as fair participation in the economic provisions of their social system. This group is quite strong in Iraq and Iran. It is the weakest in Saudi Arabia where a huge constituency of theocrats have been fostered and coddled as well as controlled by the ruling family. Nevertheless, even in Saudi Arabia, and certainly in Iraq and Iran, many people are willing to choose democracy over fascism and theocracy even if this means compromising some of their cultural biases. Hopefully, this is true in the United States as well.

There is hope for our planet if fully committed democratic forces, who are not going to mislead people or sell them out for private gain, seize the opportunity to fully inform and educate their citizenry on these three basic choices: (1) corporate fascism, (2) medieval theocracy, or (3) full democracy.

From my perspective ecological sustainability remains the core issue facing our planet, but full democracy is the wedge issue in this sense: no other major progressive transformation can take place without the support of fully functioning democracies for most of the peoples and places on the planet. Furthermore, democracy reflects the essential, profound truth that every person is of value, not because he or she is a member of some state or some culture or some race or some religion, but just because that person's existence is supported by the Infinite Ground that supports all things.