



WAITING FOR THE OTHER SHOE TO DROP: HOW INEVITABLE IS AN ISLAMIST FUTURE?

Cameron S. Brown*

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This article considers the prospects for Islamist groups gaining power in Middle Eastern countries. It begins with a brief glance at the past quarter century since the Islamic Revolution in Iran, examining why—despite predictions to the contrary—Islamists throughout the region have had only very limited success in taking power so far. It then goes on to identify the various strategies Islamists have employed so far in their quest for power, considering the likelihood that these strategies will succeed in the future in accomplishing their goals. The article also appraises the chance that success in one country will ignite an avalanche of Islamist takeovers.

Since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the world has been waiting for the other shoe to drop. Over 25 years later, however, the world is still waiting, trying to figure out where, when, and how it will happen: Where will the next Islamist takeover occur? Equally as important: Will that lead to a chain reaction of Islamist takeovers throughout the region?

The 1950s and 1960s trained the world to expect violent and sudden coups in the Middle East. In addition to numerous failed attempts (like the PLO's attempt to overthrow Jordan's King Hussein in 1970), Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Iran, and Yemen saw regimes successfully overthrown, some countries experiencing several such takeovers before a strongman established himself well enough to maintain power. In 1960, 1971 and 1980, Turkey also experienced military takeovers, though each time power was eventually restored to civilian governments.

With this experience as background, what surprised so many people about the 1979 Iranian Revolution was not that the Shah's government was unable to maintain power. What was novel was that unlike all previous takeovers and coups, the ideology purported by those assuming power was no longer focused on nationalist themes with Third Worldist undertones. Even if many groups, often with totally divergent agendas, took part in the Iranian Revolution, it was the Islamists—headed by Ruhollah Khomeini—who symbolized the revolution and eventually monopolized its outcome. Moreover, while some Arab nationalists upon coming to power had declared their desire to unite the various Arab states into one larger Arab nation, the Islamists' declared goals were much more threatening. By proclaiming a goal of exporting Islamic revolutions around the world, Khomeini and his

followers openly threatened the entire global order.

THE NOT-SO-INEVITABLE REVOLUTION

So, over 25 years later, why is the world still waiting for the next revolution? The answer is certainly not because the Islamists were uninspired by events in Iran. The years immediately following the Iranian Revolution were filled with serious Islamist attempts to overthrow the regimes in power. Indeed, Islamists did enjoy one minor victory, as they succeeded in taking power in Sudan; a temporary one, with the Taliban taking over most of Afghanistan; and a partial victory, as Hamas won the Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006 (but because Fatah's Abu Mazen remains President of the Palestinian Authority, their takeover remains limited). More crucial than these minor successes, Islamist parties have become the primary opposition group in every Arab country.

Still, in every other country, the regimes in power managed to thwart the Islamists' efforts. For example:

- In Syria, Islamists attacked the regime several times—including an attempt on Hafiz al-Asad's life in 1980 and a full-fledged coup attempt in 1982—before the Syrian army flattened the city of al-Hama, killing 20,000 of its inhabitants in the process.¹
- In Egypt, Islamists assassinated President Sadat in 1981, and attempted to do the same to Mubarak in 1995. The regime instituted a harsh crackdown of

the Islamists, and by the late 1990s, had managed to reign in their challenge.

- Islamists had strong showings in Algeria's national elections and were poised to win a second round in 1992, but were prevented from taking power by the army.
- In Turkey, the army allowed an Islamist party to come to power via elections (Refah Party in 1996), but the Islamists were unable to co-opt the army. When they crossed certain policy redlines, the army instigated their resignation.
- In Saudi Arabia, Islamists have been staging a full-fledged insurgency since May 2003. While the country's security forces are infiltrated by Islamist sympathizers, recent counter-insurgency operations have begun to turn the tide in the Kingdom.²

Looking at the experience of the past quarter century, one can conclude that in each country the regimes learned their lesson from the Iranian Revolution: A ruler must be willing to do whatever is necessary in order to maintain power.

For all regional rulers, the use of brute force—mass detentions, imprisonment, executions, torture—is only one tool they use to defeat their Islamist opponents. No less critical for these regimes' efforts to keep Islamists at bay has been their ability to co-opt them.³ One effective tactic of many leaders has been to co-opt the Islamists by giving them limited power. In Jordan, Morocco, Yemen, Algeria, and Kuwait, this

has meant allowing Islamists to run openly for parliament and, on occasion, hold the portfolio for a minor, non-security oriented ministry. In order to contain the Islamists, however, the kings or presidents have neutered their various parliaments, leaving them with only limited constitutional and legislative powers. The final say in all critical matters is usually left with the sovereign.

The third major strategy leaders have employed has been to drape themselves in the cloak of Islamic legitimacy, thus undermining the Islamists' main claim. Leaders in many countries have put on pious appearances and practices in attempt to steal back the religious card. In addition to his frequent public displays of his knowledge of Islamic sources, the late King Hassan II of Morocco claimed to be a direct descendent of Muhammad himself, and took on the title *Amir al-Mu'minin* ("Commander of the Faithful"). The Hashemite Dynasty of Jordan has made a similar claim to direct descent. After Shi'a Islamists attacked the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, Saudi Arabia's King Faud took on the title "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques," a title borrowed from the Islamic Caliphate. Many regional leaders are often photographed leading prayers (which in the West would almost be taboo, even in the relatively religious United States). Finally, Egypt and Saudi Arabia have leaned on their official religious institutions to issue rulings and give sermons in support of the regime and its various policies.

That leaders today struggle to illustrate their Islamic credentials tells us much about the state of the region; particularly how successful Islamists have been in framing the basic debate in the Middle East. In most other

developing regions, populist rhetoric is usually focused on other messages, such as development, progress, improving the plight of the poor, etc. It is rare to find a South American, Eastern European, or East Asian politician trying to use his religiosity as a central election issue.

Indeed, while they have been routed by the regimes in their attempts to gain political power, it is essential to note that Islamists have been terribly successful in winning "the war of ideas." As Emanuel Sivan has written:

Radical Islam has made tremendous inroads into the hearts and minds of Arabic-speaking Muslims. In the socio-cultural realm, militant Islamic discourse maintains a hegemony in the public debate among Arabs, replacing Pan-Arabism and Marxism. Islamism has a profound impact on gender roles, fertility, consumption habits, as well as on the marginalization of local Christians and the censorship of movies, plays and books.⁴

Indeed, in Cairo, Istanbul, or any other major metropolis in the region, the number of women covering their heads is far greater than it was a generation or two ago. While such an observation is not a perfect measure, it does serve as a rough barometer of political attitudes.

This strategy of *da'wa* (literally, the call to adopt Islam, but often used to refer to proselytizing activities) has two purposes. First, it is an attempt to transform Middle Eastern societies through non-political, grassroots social change. At the same time,

this grassroots approach is a long-term strategy for achieving the goal that has otherwise eluded the Islamists: seizing political power. By slowly convincing ever-growing numbers of people that Islam is the answer for all of society's problems, they hope to set the groundwork for their future rise to power.

ANALYZING THE POTENTIAL FOR A TAKEOVER

With this in mind, the obvious question arises: Though the regimes have deftly contended with the Islamist challenge so far, if Islamists are making inroads amongst much of the population, can they hold out forever? In other words, are there prospects for an Islamist takeover sometime soon? The follow-on question is no less critical: Would an Islamist takeover on one country lead to a chain-reaction of Islamist takeovers throughout the region?

The best way to answer this question is to consider specifically how such a takeover could occur. Until today, Islamists have used four strategies to try to obtain power: coups, terrorism, civil war/revolution, and democracy. The next section of this article will analyze the prospects for all four.

Coups

While several Islamist groups have tried to infiltrate the regimes in order to stage a *coup d'état*, except for Sudan, these efforts have all failed and are likely to continue failing. Having either gained power via such coups themselves, or at a minimum, having seen them occur next door, every regional leader knows how to ensure he does not lose his

head in a putsch. First, leaders have frequently purged their armed forces of suspected Islamists and other potential foes. In addition to removing undesirables, regimes often appoint their most loyal supporters to key positions to ensure the army is led by those who share the regime's interests. Often, this has meant counting on the same ethnic or tribal groups from which the leader himself originated.

Second, and most important, every country's leadership has succeeded in dividing and conquering its own armies. Armed forces in the region are characterized by redundancy, meaning, for instance, that there are never one or two intelligence services, but twelve. Armies are also characterized by a total lack of institutional communication, especially amongst branches of the armed forces. Joint exercises are virtually unknown.⁵

While occasionally Islamists are successful in infiltrating up to a certain point in the army, the biggest potential threat they pose is that of assassinating the regent—not replacing him. Maybe the best example of this is Anwar Sadat's assassination in 1981. While Islamists were able to get close enough to kill Sadat, they lacked the capability to gain power, and then had to bear another dictator who made sure the Islamists were properly hounded.

With this in mind, it is highly unlikely this strategy will prove successful in the future. Should the unlikely become possible, it is even more difficult to imagine that one such Islamist takeover would lead to another coup in a neighboring country. If anything, a successful coup in one country will lead its neighbors to redouble their efforts to weed out Islamists from the armed forces.

Evidence for this can be found in the fact that Sudan's Islamist takeover was an isolated affair, with no ripple effect on the region whatsoever.

Terrorism

Although terrorism has lately become the most widely used tactic by Islamists, it is even less likely to succeed than is a military coup in bringing the Islamists to power. The key reason is because blowing things up or shooting people does not give Islamists a way to come to power—i.e. it will not cause the regime to fall.⁶ Experts have often surmised that Islamists pursue terrorist strategies in order to create chaos, which would harm the country's economy (especially the lucrative tourism sector). Should the country's economy collapse, so the logic goes, public discontent would rise and this would undermine the regime's stability.

If this was their strategy, then it has largely backfired. Terrorist attacks against tourists or local targets have only strengthened the regimes, as shedding the blood of innocents and undermining people's livelihoods certainly has not endeared Islamists to the local populations. The outpouring of anger against Islamists in Egypt after the 1997 massacre of tourists at Luxor and similar expressions of anger by Jordanians in 2005 reveal terrorism's ineffectiveness. Furthermore, this public outcry gives the regime all the legitimacy it needs to conduct aggressive security operations, including the mass arrests of Islamists. When the security services arrest or kill large numbers of the Islamist leaders and membership—without giving them the

opportunity to portray themselves as martyrs of unjust repression—this inevitably leads to a weakening of these organizations.

This said, there is one important caveat: When terrorism is used against Western targets (especially the United States or Israel), it has been very effective in increasing popular support for the organization. Al-Qa'ida, Hizballah, and Hamas have all become widely popular because of their spectacular terrorist attacks.

Still, it would appear that even here, this strategy has not been wildly successful for achieving their aims. First, just because their terrorism receives wide popular support does not mean that the populations at large want to live under Islamist rule. The history of Hizballah since the late 1990s is a case in point. Following Israel's withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in May 2000, the organization won wide accolades inside Lebanon and around the region for what was perceived as its victory against the Israeli army, with many Arab pundits suggesting that Hizballah had succeeded in accomplishing what no Arab country or regular army had. As a result, Hizballah did well in national and municipal elections, most importantly in 2004 when it ran against Amal, its main Shi'a rival.⁷

However, its electoral success never exceeded the Shi'a community, as no other sect is interested in having an Islamist Shi'a government turn Lebanon into a state run according to *Shari'a* (Islamic law). Moreover, as time has passed, Hizballah's glory has waned. Without any Lebanese territory to liberate, it is difficult to legitimate its attacks on Israel, which non-Shi'a Lebanese realize could likely lead to massive

and painful Israeli retaliation. As a result, one hears increasing calls for Hizballah to be disarmed, and Hizballah's refusal to do so has pitted it against many other Lebanese groups. Also, without a war to fight, Hizballah must give its answers to Lebanon's numerous domestic problems. As mentioned, Hizballah's answers to these problems—when they exist at all—are often not in accordance with the desires of most Lebanese. This was most clearly shown on March 8, 2005, when Hizballah staged a massive rally of several hundred thousand under the slogan “fidelity to Syria,” which was meant to counter calls for a full Syrian withdrawal from Lebanese territory. This slogan, considered positively offensive by most Lebanese, provoked a rare show of unity amongst the other religious communities, which then held a counter-rally on March 14. This counter-demonstration was so successful that it drew over one million people (representing more than one-quarter of Lebanon's 3.8 million citizens).⁸ In the end, Hizballah's policies have led many to question where its loyalties lie.

Finally, even terrorism inside Western countries (like September 11 and the London and Madrid bombings) is somewhat counterproductive for the Islamist cause. While it may help whip up support amongst Middle Easterners, it has forced the victims of terrorism to join forces on certain operational and policy levels that previously were simply unimaginable. These attacks have also forced Western countries to pass legislation which bestowed law enforcement agencies with far-reaching powers to let them better find and arrest potential terrorists. Finally, these attacks have forced otherwise

apathetic citizens to re-evaluate the Muslim communities in their midst, and to reconsider their immigration and visa policies. If Islamists had any aspiration of quietly taking over Western countries, the terror attacks have made that impossible. As Daniel Pipes wrote:

...terrorism obstructs the quiet work of political Islamism. In tranquil times, [Islamist] organizations... effectively go about their business, promoting their agenda to make Islam “dominant”... Terrorism impedes these advances, stimulating hostility to Islam and Muslims. It brings Islamic organizations under unwanted scrutiny by the media, the government, and law enforcement... The July 7 bombings dramatically (if temporarily) disrupted the progress of “Londonistan,” Britain's decline into multicultural lassitude and counterterrorist ineptitude.

Some Islamists recognize this problem. One British writer admonished fellow Muslims on a Web site: “Don't you know that Islam is growing in Europe??? What the heck are you doing mingling things up???” Likewise, a Muslim watch repairer in London observed, “We don't need to fight. We are taking over!” Soumayya Ghannoushi of the University of London bitterly points out that Al-Qaeda's major achievements consist of shedding innocent blood and “fanning the flames of hostility to Islam and Muslims.”⁹

Civil War or Revolution

While revolution and civil war worked in Iran and Afghanistan (respectively), they are unlikely to work elsewhere. This is mainly because, as the experience in Algeria and Syria teaches, the Islamists are simply outgunned by the state apparatus. It has the intelligence capabilities and the major weapons systems the Islamists lack, and most importantly, they are willing to fight without fear of appearing cruel (a limitation which significantly hampers the American-led coalition in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as Israelis against the Palestinians).

This gap has grown even wider as many Middle Eastern regimes no longer attempt to fight their rivals via domestic proxies. The Kurds have historically been the region's most exploited group in this regard, as the Iranians, Syrians, and Iraqis have all armed the Kurdish communities in the neighboring countries in order to use them as a thorn in the side of their rivals. Today, this fighting by proxy is increasingly less used, with the main exception being Iran's involvement in today's Iraq. Thus, without massive, overt external military and economic aid, the chances of winning a civil war or rebellion are slim.

Furthermore, the terrible bloodshed in Algeria has scared the Islamists in many countries, especially in Northern Africa, and so they are even less likely than before to try to use force of arms to take power. As Bruce Maddy-Weitzman has said:

I can tell you that at least in Morocco the Islamist parties are deathly afraid of looking like they are trying to

assume power. They saw what happened in Algeria. They understand that any grab for power or even a perceived move toward gaining it will lead to a very sharp reaction by the authorities. My sense is that Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood also understands the weight of the Egyptian power structure—the regime, bureaucracy, and military. Thus, they, too, are not looking for power.... because they know this would lead to chaos.¹⁰

Yet it is not impossible that many of the Islamist groups that today abjure violence will reconsider returning to this strategy one day in the more distant future. Such a scenario is most likely should two conditions come to pass: 1) that the Islamists come to believe that the regimes have outsmarted them and left them no alternative for gaining power (in particular, via democratic elections); and 2) that they have the support of the overwhelming majority of the population and at least some of the key elites (e.g. economic, military). Perceived regime weakness, especially due to external pressure, could also tip the scales in this regard. It is this second condition, of course, which makes the Islamists' *da'wa* activities potentially so menacing.

Should such conditions come to pass and such a rebellion succeed, there would be a decent chance of this strategy being repeated elsewhere, especially where conditions were ripe. This is because it could convince Islamists that this strategy, which at present seems futile, has the potential to succeed.

Democracy

Precisely because all violent options for obtaining control are very likely to fail, most local Islamist groups around the world now seek to take advantage of democratic openings to gain control of the state apparatus; and it appears that such a strategy might yet bear fruit. In most countries, should there be open elections today, Islamists would either win them or come in second—well ahead, for example, of liberal reformers.

Of course, the most obvious example of the potential electoral strength of the Islamists is in the Palestinian Authority. In the January 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections, Hamas won 74 out of 132 seats, with the ruling Fatah party winning only 45, and the three liberal parties winning a paltry total of six seats. This election marked the first time since Algeria's fated elections that Islamists were allowed to run against a regime on the national level without restrictions in what was roundly deemed fair and free elections.

This event was undoubtedly the crowning achievement for Hamas. For over a decade, the movement has been the second most popular organization (behind Fatah), with opinion polls showing support ranging between 20-40 percent. Due to the movement's boycott of the 1996 PLC elections (because they were the product of the Oslo Accords), only a handful of Islamists won seats (as independents). In 2005, Hamas participated fully for the first time in local elections, winning anywhere from a quarter to a third of the overall vote, and gaining majorities in most of Gaza and the Hebron area. Still, it is worth

remembering that because Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazin) remains President, Hamas's rule is by no means absolute.

Recent elections in Egypt also show a similar trend. In the 2005 Majlis (parliament) elections, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) gained 19 percent of the vote (88 seats out of a 454-member parliament). The MB potentially could have done even better, but the country's security forces employed considerable violence (which led to 11 deaths) in an attempt to keep voters from getting to the polls in certain districts. Much more importantly, the MB only contested a third of all available seats—largely out of a desire not to embarrass Mubarak's party, which could have led to a future crackdown.¹¹ This means that of the 148 contested seats, the majority (88) went to the MB. In contrast, the liberal opposition parties together won fewer than ten seats.

A similar picture can be found throughout the region. In Yemen, where parliamentary elections were held on April 27, 2003, the Islamist party *al-Tajmu al-Yamani li al-Islah* (the Yemeni Congregation for Reform) took second place, winning 23 percent of the vote (which translated into 46 out of 301 seats). In Kuwait, while there are no official political parties, of the *Majlis al-Umma's* (National Assembly) 50 members, an estimated 21 are Islamists, with 14 government supporters, three liberals, and 12 non-partisans. In Jordan, after the parties allied with King Abdallah II, the Islamist party—the Islamic Action Front—won the second largest bloc with 18 of 104 seats. In Morocco, the Justice and Development Party (*Parti de la Justice et du Développement*) took third place.¹² Finally, while Islamists are generally only allowed to run as independents, except for

professional unions and student council elections, more often than not, Islamists sweep the elections.

Why do Islamists do so well throughout the region? The primary reason is the ineptitude of the present regimes in providing for their citizens. Unemployment is rife, and the economies have stagnated for over four decades.¹³ Militarily, these regimes have been humiliated by Israel and the United States, or even worse (as far as many constituents are concerned), they often did not even try to aid their “brother” countries in their fights. For all the problems the countries in the region face, the Islamic opposition has a simple, straight-forward solution: Islam is the answer.

Islamist organizations have then attempted to prove that they can govern more effectively by building alternative health care, schooling, and welfare systems, often relying on Saudi or Gulf Arab largess. To their credit, their welfare and health care systems are generally considered to be relatively much more effective at meeting the needs of the local populations than those of the government.

Maybe the main reason for the Islamists’ record of efficiently providing for residents is that they by and large have avoided the one pitfall that has been key to every regime’s total ineffectiveness: pervasive corruption. Here the Islamists have all wisely portrayed themselves as beyond corruptibility, and this has been a key to their rising popularity.

Turkey’s Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi* or AKP) is a case in point. The party (which is a moderate breakaway faction of its hard-line

predecessor, the Islamist Welfare Party) won the November 2002 elections by a landslide, taking 363 of 550 seats. AKP was so successful that it became the first party to form a non-coalition government since 1987.

The important point about AKP’s victory, however, is that many of those who voted for the party were not necessarily religious themselves. Instead, a large number of the electorate voted for AKP because they were frustrated by widespread corruption amongst politicians and the inability of the various established parties to provide solutions for the country’s longstanding social and economic problems. Indeed, in a poll taken three months before the elections, 93 percent of respondents said they were dissatisfied with the state of their country (the second highest of all 44 countries surveyed); 91 percent were dissatisfied with Ecevit specifically (the lowest marks of any world leader by his citizens). In addition, 79 percent of Turks believed their politicians were corrupt, and only seven percent thought the national government had a positive influence on their lives.¹⁴

This leads us back to Hamas’s stellar electoral victory. Here as well, opinion polls consistently demonstrate that most voters placed their ballots for Hamas, not primarily because of their social agenda or even their unwavering willingness to fight Israel, but rather because the ruling Fatah party was deemed entirely corrupt and utterly inept at solving the people’s problems. One election-day poll, for example, found that a quarter of Palestinian voters put corruption as the most important consideration for voting; 37 percent reported that ending the lawlessness and chaos was the central issue for

determining people's vote. Likewise, in any country where 75 percent of respondents report that they personally do not feel safe and secure in their homes, incumbents are likely to lose by a landslide. In fact, even 19 percent of self-identified "non-religious" voters supported Hamas.¹⁵

All of the above demonstrates that democracy is a very viable pathway for Islamists to gain power. Moreover, while ballot box success of AKP and Hamas have not yet sparked a chain reaction, should an Islamist party come to power elsewhere in the Arab world, the situation may be different. The main question, therefore, is how close to ultimate control can this path lead the Islamists?

In Turkey, the regime actually allowed Islamists in the form of the Welfare (or *Refah*) party to come to power via elections in 1996. For almost two years, up until February 1998, the army (which serves as the guardian of the secular state and democracy) gave Refah a fairly free hand to make policy as it saw fit. It was only when the Refah-led government decided to cross certain redlines, especially by re-aligning the country's foreign policy, that the army instigated the government's downfall. Still, in 2002, the army allowed for the AKP to take power, and until today, has not interfered. One key reason for AKP's post-election success in maintaining power has been that it is not an Islamist party *per se*, but rather a party that is pushing for religious freedom for individuals, such as allowing women to wear headscarves. Should they attempt to impose the practice of Shari'a, AKP would likely find itself right beside Refah.

This brings us to the two main problems democracy creates for Islamists seeking

power. The first problem for the Islamists was mentioned in the beginning of this article: In every Arab country, the kings or presidents have neutered their various parliaments to various degrees, leaving them with only limited constitutional and legislative powers. Wherever there are limited experiments in democracy, the final say in all crucial matters remains fully in the hands of the country's ruler. (In Turkey's case the army has traditionally been the body with the veto power over the country's elected officials, if to a much lesser extent.)

Moreover, the regimes have shrewdly used the very real threat of Islamists gaining power as their response to Western demands for greater democratization. In this way, they continue to prevent the parliaments and elections from truly challenging their rule. As a result, it is highly unlikely—but not inconceivable—that this status quo will change any day soon, as no monarch or president in the region willingly wants to forfeit power. If there is a chance for a change in this status quo, it is during periods of transition (for instance, when Mubarak passes away). Still, even these moments have not made a major difference in the recent past: Three regimes (Jordan, Syria, and Morocco) have smoothly overcome such interregnums without making significant concessions to Islamists or democracy advocates. While Yasir Arafat's death did lead the way to Hamas's control of the PLC, the most important position moved smoothly to Arafat's successor, Abu Mazin.

Finally, even if they should come to wield meaningful power (like in the PA and Turkey), Islamists will quickly come to see that it is always much easier to be in the opposition than to take on the difficult task of

actually governing a country effectively. This is especially the case in the Middle East, where each government has a myriad of severe problems before it and in every area (educational, health, economic, etc.). Moreover, being in power means sometimes compromising on one's principles in order to deal with the real-life problems, the likes of which theoretical ideologies do not have to dirty their hands. So that as governments fail to solve problems, and as politicians retreat from principles, their popularity wanes and eventually they are voted out of office.

There is little reason to believe the Islamists are immune to this. One only need consider that the one Middle Eastern country where liberal reformers are the main opposition movement is Iran.¹⁶ That the Iranian democratic opposition enjoys overwhelming support among the people suggests that eventually Islamist regimes will also come to be despised as much as the present ones are today. What is essential, therefore, is that so long as Islamists are not allowed to make the election that brings them to power the last one held, there is reason to believe democracy—in the long run—could lead to the Islamists' eventual demise.

CONCLUSION

Given all four strategies—coup d'état, terror, civil war/revolution, and democracy—it is the last that is the most likely path for Islamists to obtain power; today's most important debate is how the United States and Europe should deal with this contingency.¹⁷ This debate has taken on added urgency due to the success of Hamas,

Hizballah, and the MB in Egypt, which has made the dilemma for the West perfectly clear: How can countries vigorously press for democratic reform if that may lead to the election of groups that, to understate the matter, are totally hostile to the West itself?

Answering this question requires a full article in itself, but as the bold Egyptian reformer Hala Mustafa has argued, part of the solution must be in creating a space for liberal reformers to have their opinions heard in Arab society. At present, while the regime allows Islamists multiple platforms for expressing their views, the liberal reformers are generally shut out of the media, unable to give a truly unique alternative to the current discourse.¹⁸

The other essential aspect to facing this dilemma, however, will be making sure that those Islamists who come to power fail in achieving their goals. For just as success can have momentum, so too can failure. Should, for example, the Hamas government become synonymous amongst Palestinians with failure and ineptitude—and especially if it is clear that this was the price of stubbornly pursuing their dogmatic policies—then it will make Islamist parties in other countries significantly less attractive.

**Cameron S. Brown is the Deputy Director of the Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) Center, a part of the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, Israel. His recent academic publications include: "The One Coalition They Craved to Join: Turkey in the Korean War," Review of International Studies (forthcoming); "Israel's WMD Policy" in a book published by the*

Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (forthcoming); "Azerbaijani Attitudes towards Karabakh and Iranian Azerbaijan," Middle East Journal (Autumn 2004); and "Israel's Counterproliferation Policy: Lessons for Europe," MERIA Journal (September 2004).

NOTES

¹ One of the best accounts of the Syrian assault on al-Hama is in Thomas Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem* (London: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1989), chapter 4.

² To read more on this see Joshua Teitelbaum, "Terrorist Challenges to Saudi Arabian Internal Security," *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA Journal)*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (September 2005), <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2005/issue3/jv9no3a1.html>.

³ For a thoughtful and comprehensive treatment of how the regimes skillfully use carrots and sticks to stay in power, see Barry Rubin, *Tragedy of the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁴ Emmanuel Sivan, "Why Radical Muslims Aren't Taking Over Governments," *MERIA Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (May 1998), pp. 9-16, <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1998/issue2/jv2no2a2.html>.

⁵ For more on this subject, see Barry Rubin and Thomas A. Keaney (eds.), *Armed Forces in the Contemporary Middle East: Politics and Strategy* (London & Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass, 2001).

⁶ Here it is important to define terrorism. Not every car bombing or shooting is an act of terrorism, as sometimes it could be an

assassination attempt of a political or military target. I suggest using the definition given by Boaz Ganor, head of the Institute for Counter-Terrorism, who defines terrorism as the "intentional use of, or threat to use violence against civilians or against civilian targets, in order to attain political aims." One might also add that the general intention of this violence is to intimidate or create general panic (i.e. terror) amongst a civilian population. For more on this see Boaz Ganor, "Defining Terrorism: Is One Man's Terrorist another Man's Freedom Fighter?" ICT website, September 24, 1998, <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=49>.

⁷ For more on Hizballah's success, see Rodger Shanahan, "Hizballah Rising: The Political Battle for the Loyalty of the Shi'a of Lebanon," *MERIA Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (March 2005).

⁸ See Michel Touma, "Restoring Democracy in Lebanon," *White Paper Series: Voices from the Middle East on Democratization and Reform* (Foundation for the Defense of Democracy), March 2006, http://www.defenddemocracy.org/usr_doc/LebanonMarch06.pdf.

⁹ Daniel Pipes, "How Terrorism Obstructs Radical Islam," *New York Sun*, August 23, 2005

<http://www.danielpipes.org/article/2888>.

¹⁰ Roundtable Discussion, "The State of Democracy in Middle East States," *MERIA Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (September 2005), <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2005/issue3/jv9no3a9.html>.

¹¹ *International Herald Tribune*, December 8, 2005.

¹² Statistics come from <http://www.electionworld.org>.

¹³ Between 1965-2000 Middle Eastern economies annual growth was only three percent, with Sub-Saharan Africa as the only region doing worse. When the region's high population growth rate is figured in, annual per capita growth rate was a mere 0.1 percent. As of today, 29 percent of the region lives on less than \$2 a day. See Eric Swanson, et al., *World Development Indicators, 2001* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2001).

¹⁴ Pew Research Center, "How Global Publics View: Their Lives, Their Countries, The World, America," December 4, 2002, pp. 27, 32, 36, 43, <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/165.pdf>; Bulent Gokay and Bulent Aras, "Turkey After Copenhagen: Walking a Tightrope--Part II," *Turkish Daily News*, February 11, 2003.

¹⁵ PSR - Survey Research Unit: PSR's Exit Poll Results, "On the Election Day for the Second Palestinian Parliament: A Crumpling Peace Process and a Greater Public Complaint of Corruption and Chaos Gave Hamas a Limited Advantage Over Fateh, but Fragmentation within Fateh Turned that Advantage into an Overwhelming Victory." February 15, 2006, <http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2006/exitpollfulljan06e.html>.

¹⁶ While an Iranian democratic revolution would create a tremendous reverberation around the region, it is unlikely that this would fundamentally change the situation in any Arab country.

¹⁷ For examples, see Sa'ad Eddin Ibrahim in *The New York Times*, Tarek Heggy in *The*

Washington Times, and Barry Rubin in *The Jerusalem Post*.

¹⁸ Hala Mustafa, "A Policy for Promoting Liberal Democracy in Egypt," *White Paper Series: Voices from the Middle East on Democratization and Reform* (Foundation for the Defense of Democracy), May 2006 http://www.defenddemocracy.org/usr_doc/Promoting_Democracy_in_Egypt.pdf.