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International Elections Experts, Monitors,
and Representations in the Arab World

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EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE
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Abstract

Elections are sites of festivity, celebrity, and sometimes dramatic suspense, unique occasions for the simultaneous nationwide engagement of candidates, campaign volunteers, poll-workers, voters, and even abstainers and school-children in the quintessential patriotic experience. Yet in an era of globalization, national elections are not necessarily purely domestic affairs; a large cadre of expatriate consultants, trainer-trainers, and monitors often participate directly. This paper considers two alternative understandings of the role of North American, European, and international democracy brokers in Arab elections since the early nineteen nineties. The usual story is that Western democracies set aside democratic altruism to protect vital interests, allies, and spheres of influence in the Middle East: instrumental realism trumps lofty idealism. The counter-argument is that a transnational regime, industry, or consortium of experts forging technical standards and sharing knowledge through epistemic communities gradually empowers Arab publics to select their leaders. This paper presents the case that these mutually exclusive viewpoints reflect concurrent yet fundamentally incompatible patterns. Evident for over a decade, these trajectories collided in the ironic juxtaposition of "by the book" Palestinian elections that defied Western preferences with the unorthodox, slapdash balloting in Iraq. In other words, great powers disregard and ultimately undermine the "codes of conduct" written by transnational networks of experts and understood by an important segment of the educated Arab public. The analysis contains an ethical paradox inasmuch as Euro-American interference in Arab elections would be easier to criticize if it were not resisted by despots defending decidedly anti-democratic practices.

Keywords

Elections; Political Aid; Euro-Mediterranean Policies; American Foreign Policy

Elections are sites of festivity, celebrity, and sometimes dramatic suspense, unique occasions for the simultaneous nationwide engagement of candidates, campaign volunteers, poll-workers, voters, and even abstainers and school-children in the quintessential patriotic experience. Yet in an era of globalization, national elections are not necessarily purely domestic affairs; a large cadre of expatriate consultants, trainer-trainers, and monitors often shape and evaluate the process. This paper considers two alternative understandings of the role North American, European, and international democracy brokers in Arab elections have played since the early nineteen nineties, and concludes that they each accurately describe contradictory trajectories that collided in the contrasting encounters in Palestine and Iraq in 2005/06. In doing so it helps explain how foreign and even local consultants, instructors, and monitors can be seen as agents of empire and/ or networks of activists, and why Arab governments, intellectuals, and publics, especially the tens of thousands trained in the “rules of the game,” are skeptical about Western “pressure to democratize.”

The two views of the work done by international advisors and poll-watchers are also two views of globalization in general. In the most frequent, largely autobiographical telling, Western democracies instrumentally set aside principled altruism in order to protect vital interests, allies, and hegemonic aspirations in the Middle East: realism, or the pursuit of unilateral self-interest, outweighs the commitment to lofty ideals. The counter-argument is that a transnational regime, industry, or consortium of experts forging technical standards and sharing knowledge through epistemic communities gradually empowers Arab publics to select their leaders. This paper presents the case that these are not mutually exclusive paradigms but, rather, concurrent yet fundamentally incompatible patterns that produced the ironic juxtaposition of “by the book” Palestinian elections that defied Western preferences with the slapdash balloting in Iraq much ballyhooed abroad. In other words, great powers disregard and ultimately undermine the “codes of conduct” written by transnational networks of experts and understood by a significant cadre within the informed Arab public.

American Realpolitik

In the autobiographical American narrative typically framed in terms of a moral dilemma, foreign policy is driven by ideals except when they are dampened by interest-driven exigencies.¹ “Caught up in the contradiction between global principle and regional application, the United States is accused of meddling, by undemocratic ruling elites who feel undermined by Washington’s democratic evangelism, and of hypocrisy, by indigenous liberal-democratic reformers and human rights advocates.”² In the nineteen nineties America faced a “democracy conundrum” posed by the difficulty of “balancing between its principles – support for free and fair elections – and its particular interests.”³ For all the Clinton administration’s engagement with the “peace process,” political reform seemed an “afterthought” relegated to the level of “low policy” and complicated by a fear of Arab populism.⁴

* An earlier version of this paper was presented in Workshop 06 ‘Mapping Transnational Networks in the Middle East: Local Logics and Global Processes’ at the Ninth Mediterranean Research Meeting, Florence & Montecatini Terme, 12-15 March 2008, organised by the Mediterranean Programme of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute.

1 In the volume edited by Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry, Takashi Inoguchi, eds., *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts*, Oxford UP: 2000, leading American political scientists entertain the idealism-realism debate with respect to democracy promotion.

2 Michael C. Hudson, “To Play the Hegemon: Fifty Years of US Policy Toward the Middle East,” *The Middle East Journal* 50:3 1996 (329-343), p. 342

3 Richard W. Murphy and F. Gregory Gause, “Democracy and U.S. Policy in the Muslim Middle East,” *Middle East Policy*, V:1 1997 (58-67), pp. 59-60. See also Catharin E. Dalpino, *Deferring Democracy: Promoting Openness in Authoritarian Regimes* Washington, Brookings Institution Press: 2000

4 Amy Hawthorne, “The ‘Democracy Dilemma’ in the Arab World: How do you promote reform without undermining key United States Interests?” *Foreign Service Journal*, February 2001

Helping “democracy and free markets to expand and survive,” according to the web page of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) was not a “democratic crusade” but “uniquely structured to support key U.S. foreign policy interests.”⁵

For all the Bush administration’s lip service to a freedom agenda after 9/11, scholars still saw a disconnect between words and deeds.⁶ A paltry \$29 million was allocated to the whole much-ballyhooed Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) for 2003.⁷ Even in 2004, White House fears that aggressive pressure to democratize could undermine regional allies led it to embrace the “survival strategy” of “controlled liberalization.”⁸ And pressures for political liberalization were contradicted by simultaneous demands on governments to embrace unpopular policies towards Iraq, Israel, and terrorism.⁹ Ultimately, the Carnegie Institution’s top transitologist called the “gleaming rhetorical edifice” around the export of freedom and democracy “a myth” eclipsed by economic imperatives and the war on terror.¹⁰

Euro-Mediterranean Ambitions

Despite its claims to a higher morality, Europe has consistently sought hegemony in the Mediterranean, too.¹¹ Where democratization may conflict with geo-politics, “The EU will always give higher priority to security.”¹² Rarely is serious financial assistance for other projects “conditional” on holding “open” elections; one authority dubbed political conditionality the “dog that didn’t bite.”¹³ Moreover, the oft-stated objectives of “decentralized cooperation” seemed at odds with the prevalence of military and police establishments in the vast Euro-Med dialogue.¹⁴ In the late nineties the EU aimed to “seize back” the peace process from the US; offset instability and fundamentalism; and enhance “hub-and-spoke trade relations.”¹⁵ In the 21st century, while Europeans were open to the notion that free elections would favor long-term stability in the short run they often deduced a zero-sum trade-off between democratization and security.¹⁶ Some hoped new initiatives like the Foundation

5 “Building Democracy in Asia and the Near East,” www.usaid.gov/democracy (viewed in July 2001)

6 Katerina Dalacoura, “US Democracy Promotion in the Arab Middle East since 11 September 2001: a critique” *International Affairs* 81, 5(2005) 963-979, p. 972

7 See also Marina Ottoway, “Promoting Democracy in the Middle East: The Problem of US Credibility,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Working Papers, Democracy and Rule of Law Project, N. 35, March 2003

8 Tamara Kofman Wittes, “Arab Democracy, American Ambivalence,” *The Weekly Standard* February 23, 2004 (34-37). Budgets for democracy promotion were being transferred to police training, according to Peter Banker, “Democracy In Iraq Not A Priority in U.S. Budget,” *Washington Post*, April 5, 2006; Page A01.

9 Shibley Telhami, “Exporting Democracy to the Middle East,” *Dissent* Spring 2007, pp.57-58 (57)

10 Thomas Carothers, “The Democracy Crusade Myth,” National Interest Online June 6, 2007
<http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=14550>

11 Dimitris K. Xenakis, “Order and Change in the Euro-Mediterranean System,” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 11/1 (2000).

12 Gorm Rye Olsen, “The European Union: An Ad Hoc Policy with a Low Priority,” Peter J. Schraeder, editor, *Exporting Democracy: Rhetoric vs. Reality* Lynne Rienner 2002, 131-145, quote p. 133

13 Richard Youngs, “Democracy Promotion: The Case of European Union Strategy,” Brussels, Center for European Policy Studies Working Document No. 167, October 2001, p. 37. See also Sabine C. Zanger, “Good Governance and European Aid: The Impact of Conditionality,” *European Union Politics* 1:3 2000, pp. 293-317.

14 Fatiha Talahite, “Le partenariat euro-mediterraneen vu du Sud,” *Maghreb-Mashrek* 153 July-September 1996 (45-60).

15 Paul Rivlin, *Economic Policy and Performance in the Arab World*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner: 2001, pp. 169-185.

16 Richard Gillespie, “A Political Agenda for Region-building? The EMP and Democracy Promotion in North Africa,” Institute of European Studies University of California at Berkeley 2004: Paper 040530. Malmvig, Helle, “Caught between cooperation and democratization: the Barcelona Process and the EU’s double-discursive approach,” *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 9:4 2006, pp. 343-370.

for the Dialogue of Cultures and a Mediterranean parliamentary assembly would help balance the reassertion of US military might after 2001.¹⁷

The G-7's greater Middle East initiative of June 2004 came across as a case of rhetorical commitments to political liberalization overlaid on old fashioned realism.¹⁸ Declarations surrounding initiatives called the "Partnership for Progress," a "Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa," a "Forum for the Future," and a "Knowledge Society" variously bound the G-8 industrial nations, the Middle East Quartet of the EU, the US, the UN, and Russia, and the Barcelona Process, also known as Euro-Med, with MEPI and the Japan-Arab Dialogue in a collective commitment to democratizing Afghanistan, Iraq, and the rest of the region. Actually the watered-down declarations featured non-controversial platitudes about freedom, peace, capitalism, and elections.¹⁹ So even though the summit specifically committed participants to elections assistance, most Arab spectators saw it as an episode in great power politics.²⁰

Virtual Democratization

In the global South the conventional wisdom is that far from offering the tools for popular elections to overthrow friendly despots and pro-business elites, political aid is a way of disciplining the unruly politics of underdevelopment on behalf of comprador elites.²¹ Latin Americanists contend that Washington promotes nothing more than low-intensity democracy, and regard USAID, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Ford, Carnegie, and Soros foundations, and beltway bandit contractors as agents of Yankee imperialism. Publications like Carnegie's *Arab Reform Bulletin* and the NED's *Journal of Democracy* produce and reproduce a narrative about US leadership of global democratization that is a kind of cover story for a pervasive system of domination. Controlled liberalization amounts to a "shift from coercive to consensual forms of compliance," but still aims to stem mass mobilization.²² The "rule of experts" replaces the democratic will of sovereign people.²³ Democratization is thereby divorced from self-determination.

In Africa, Asia, and Latin America as well as in the Arab world, liberal euphemisms often register as imperial propaganda. "Democratic evangelism" is said to be about constructing frameworks for thought and providing yardsticks to measure inferiority.²⁴ Development assistance generally entails a process of "framing" whereby ritual documentary techniques create an impression of order and measurable progress; the professional's work is a kind of "production, large parts of which must be

17 Ana Palacio Vallersundi, "The Barcelona Process: A Euro-Mediterranean North-South Partnership," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* V:1 2004 (145-151)

18 Gilbert Achcar, "Fantasy of a Region That Doesn't Exist - Greater Middle East: the US plan," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 2004, <http://mondediplo.com/2004/04/04world>; Ignacio Álvarez-Ossorio Alvariño, "The European Strategy for the Middle East," Jean Monnet/Robert Schuman Paper Series 4:19, December 2004

19 Among the statements were <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/06/20040609-30.html> (Aug 1, 2007) and Department of State International Information Programs, "G8 Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative," at <http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/Archive/2004/Jun/09-319840.html>. See also Tamara Koffman Wittes, "The New US Proposal for a Greater Middle East Initiative: An Evaluation," The Saban Center at the Brookings Institution, Memo 2, May 10, 2004.

20 Sami E. Baroudi, "Arab Intellectuals and the Bush Administration's Campaign for Democracy: The Case of the Greater Middle East Initiative," *Middle East Journal* 61:3, 2007 quotes Arab editorial opinion extensively.

21 Omar G. Encarnacion, "The Follies of Democratic Imperialism," *World Policy Journal* 22: 1 (Spring 2005) p. 47-60

22 William I. Robinson, "Globalization, the world system, and "democracy promotion" in US foreign policy," *Theory and Society* 25 (5), Oct. 96: 615-665, p. 643.

23 Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, University of California Press 2002).

24 Hisham M. Nazer, *Power of a Third Kind: The Western Attempt to Colonize the Global Village* (Westport, Connecticut, and London, Praeger: 1999) p. xxiii, 13-15. For a similar point from a different perspective, see Kennedy, Liam and Scott Lucasm "Enduring Freedom: Public Diplomacy and U.S. Foreign Policy," *American Quarterly* 57.2 (2005) 309-333.

achieved without the subjects of development. They must construct an entire theatrical scenario for the project, including the dramatic conceit, the sequences of plot, the set and props, and the cast of stars, and of thousands of ‘extras’.”²⁵ These observations would apply doubly to elections, which offer drama and suspense, victory and defeat, stars and extras, and rituals of documentation, and in particular to the “demonstration elections” in Vietnam and Latin America that helped shore up domestic support for military ventures abroad.²⁶ But it is one thing to choreograph an election, or to diagram a schematic process, and quite another to reengineer a polity; the fact that the “democratic offensive” is “meant to be an element in the politics of domination,” wrote one critic, “doesn’t automatically make it happen.”²⁷

Multilateral Institutionalism

Whereas realists dismiss transnational institutions under the heading of nebulous moral principles or as mere minions of American foreign policy, a more legalistic, epistemic paradigm holds that multilateral mechanisms, polyglot teams, and “non-governmental” organizations minimize the perception of meddling in domestic politics and increase the legitimacy of the activity.²⁸ This is why the National Endowment for Democracy, Canada’s International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, all modeled on the German Stiftungen, were formed, around the same time, as publicly funded “non-governmental” organizations that hold transnational “democracy summits” attended by representatives of more foundations every year.²⁹

Although Washington likes to claim ownership of a “world movement for democracy,” elections-mongering should not be confused with American foreign policy. Via its accession process, the EU Elections Unit, and other organizations such as the Network of Europeans for Electoral and Democracy Support have amassed considerable *savoir-faire* in the facilitation of high-quality elections, European Parliamentarians regularly witness overseas elections, and in many countries EU projects and experts outnumber American. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, established in Stockholm in 1992 as a formally inter-governmental organization, well known by the acronym International IDEA, propagates standards and initiatives like electoral quotas for women. German-based organizations like Transparency International and the Social-Democrat’s Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, and others across the continent have offices in or send consultants to North Africa and West Asia; individual Italian, Swedish, and Polish politicians lead Election Day entourages. Canada is quite hub for elections-related projects. Furthermore, of course, the United Nations has world-class capabilities to oversee elections, institutionalized in 1992 in an electoral assistance unit dealing with outside or domestic poll-watchers, administrative and technical advice, voter registration, training of election officials, overall logistics, procurement of election materials,

David Craig and Doug Porter, “Framing Participation: Development Projects, Professionals, and Organizations,” p. 54, in Melakou Tegegn *Development and Patronage* (UK, Oxfam: 1997), pp. 50-57

26 Edward S. Herman and Frank Brodhead, *Demonstration Elections: U.S.-staged elections in the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, and El Salvador*, South End Press, 1984

27 Jochen Hippler, “Democratisation of the Third World After the End of the Cold War,” in Hippler, ed., *The Democratisation of Disempowerment: The Problem of Democracy in the Third World* London, Pluto Press: 1999 (1-32), p. 38

28 Jon C. Pevehouse, “Democracy from the Outside-In? International Organizations and Democratization,” *International Organization* 56:3, 2002 pp 515-549; David P. Forsythe and Barbara Ann Rieffer, “US Foreign Policy and Enlarging the Democratic Community”: *Human Rights Quarterly* 22: 4, 2000, 998-1010; Rob Jenkins, “Collateral Benefit: Iraq and Increased Legitimacy for International Trusteeship.” *Dissent* 53: 2, 2006, 72-5.

29 A list of member institutes is available at <http://www.wmd.org/ndri/ndri.html> (June 2006)

coordination of foreign aid, and computerization of electoral rolls.³⁰ The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) also has an elections-auditing record, and Arab League, the Organization of African States, and other regional organizations sometimes field teams of witnesses.

All of these organizations collaborate in transnational conferences and joint declarations and coordinate activities surrounding particular elections. In this way, they approximate an international “regime” of norms, rules, institutions and practices³¹ that functions in part to replicate parallel agencies and policies around the world, often explicitly through “capacity building” and “institutional strengthening” programs conducted by aid donors and United Nations agencies; and in part to constitute an “epistemic community” of knowledgeable specialists to generate and disseminate the “reasons, habits, expectations, and compelling arguments” for processes and policies.³² Some scholars talk about this in terms of norm socialization.³³ This model captures the information-transfer dimensions of electoral assistance, which range from expert advice for electoral commissioners to the training of trainers in the art of poll-watching. None of this NATO-centric activity contravenes the theory a hegemon articulates normative principles, and also delegates authority to allies and multilateral institutions, in order “to facilitate construction of an order conducive to its interests.”³⁴ Nor does it mean that great powers don’t strive collectively and individually to take charge of political change. But transnational regimes can and do take on a life of their own, and the rules aren’t necessarily in the interest of the hegemon.

Rules of the Game

An explicit goal for democracy builders is to institutionalize specialized universal norms, administrative arrangements, and habits. An international metric evolved from conferences and declarations such as the 1990 Copenhagen document of the OSCE and the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s 1994 Criteria for Free and Fair Elections. In 1999, Elections Canada hosted the first meeting of the Global Electoral Organization Network and helped found something called the Partnership for Electoral and Democratic Development. In 2000, the UN Commission on Human Rights specifically cajoled one-party states like Iraq and Egypt to open competition to opposition parties. International IDEA took the lead in writing codes of conduct as well as Guidelines for Determining Involvement in International Election Observation, and the UN issued the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers based on IDEA’s work on October 27, 2005, scarcely two months before the Iraqi elections for a permanent legislature. The rationale for standardized reference points, according to a former Canadian Prime Minister, was that “When international election observation missions gather information methodically, comprehensively, and accurately, and analyze it objectively and impartially, the reports they produce

30 United Nations, “Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Principle of Periodic and Genuine Elections,” (New York, document A/RES/45/150. February 21, 1991); see also the website, <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/ead/website5.htm> (December 2000)

31 Robert Keohane *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Disorder in World Political Economy* (Princeton, Princeton University Press: 1984).

32 Emanuel Adler; Peter M. Haas, “Conclusion: Epistemic Communities, World Order, and the Creation of a Reflective Research Program,” *International Organization* 45:1, 1992 (367-390), p. 372.

33 Andrew P. Cortell; James W. Davis, Jr., “Understanding the Domestic Impact of International Norms: A Research Agenda,” *International Studies Review*, 2: 1. (2000), pp. 65-87. Roger A. Payne, “Persuasion, Frames, and Norm Construction,” *European Journal of International Relations*, 7: 1, 37-61 (2001), and Amitav Acharya, “How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism,” *International Organization* (2004), 58: 239-275

34 G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan, “Socialization and Hegemonic Power,” *International Organization* 44:3, 1990, 283-315, p. 284

will be credible and legitimate in the eyes of both the participating governments and the international community.”³⁵ About two dozen democracy brokers and multilateral institutions signed on.³⁶

The Declaration of Principles defines international elections monitoring as “the systematic, comprehensive and accurate gathering of information,” to be impartially and professionally analyzed in order to draw “conclusions about the character of electoral processes based on the highest standards for accuracy of information and impartiality of analysis.” It insists upon scrupulous “impartiality concerning national political competitors” and absolute freedom “from any bilateral or multilateral considerations that could conflict with impartiality.”³⁷ These elaborate codes attempted to address the various allegations of partiality, infringement of sovereignty, and snap judgments with methodologies for evaluating a long checklist including conditions like equal media access for candidates. They also obligate host governments to meet obligations including guarantees to accredited delegations of safe access to all polling stations. Thus the standards for UN member states holding elections as well as the practices of outside evaluators have been well codified. As Carnegie’s top expert observed, sound-bite pronouncements were now a symptom of inexperience with the complexities and formal methodologies of evaluating the process.³⁸

The Third Wave of Democratization

During the so-called third wave of democratization evidence both of realist opportunism and the evolution of a transnational regime surfaced. Early in the nineties North Atlantic powers winked at annulment of Algerian elections, cheered the shallow voting exercise in Kuwait, and down-played relatively robust balloting in newly unified Yemen. Paris and Washington expressed relief when the Algerian military annulled elections destined to be won by an Islamist party in 1991/92, and the G-7 donors led by France actually increased their financial assistance afterwards.³⁹ Effusively disproportionate coverage of nonpartisan voting by a fraction of Kuwait’s male population a few months later was more about celebrating the kingdom’s liberation from Iraqi occupation than about supporting pro-democracy forces in the country.⁴⁰ By contrast, even though delegations of European and American monitors including former President Jimmy Carter witnessed Yemeni men and women dipping their fingers in purple ink after a multiparty campaign, an American diplomat, still angry at Yemeni “neutrality” in the 1991 war against Iraq, declared “one election does not a democracy make” and hinted Yemen should emulate Kuwait.⁴¹ So in the three cases taken together, as well as inside the

35 Elections Canada, “Consolidating Democratic Progress: Elections Canada on the International Scene,” *Electoral Insight* November 1999, at http://www.elections.ca/eca/eim/article_search/article.asp?id=102&lang=e&frmPageSize=&textonly=false Quoted, p.7

36 NDI/ Carter Center Press Release, “Unprecedented - Election Monitoring Standards Adopted,” October 27, 2005. The impressive range of signatories were listed in a Commonwealth News Release, “Commonwealth to Host International Meeting on Election Observation Principles,” May 30, 2006, at http://www.thecommonwealth.org/press/31555/151575/commonwealth_to_host_international_meeting_on_elec.htm (July 21, 2006)

37 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, p.1

38 Carothers made this point already before 1999, in *The Learning Curve*, p. 134.

39 Larbi Sadiki, “To Export or Not to Export Democracy to the Arab World: The Islamist Perspective,” *Arab Studies Journal* VI:1 1998 , 60-75 (p.67). Bradford Dillman, “Round Up the Unusual Suspects: American Policy Toward Algeria and Its Islamists,” *Middle East Policy* VIII; 2 June 2002.

40 Jill Crystal and Abdallah al-Shayeji, “The Pro-Democratic Agenda in Kuwait: Structures and Context,” in Korany, Noble, and Byrnen, pp.101-125, p.114.

41 David Mack, talk at the American Institute for Yemeni Studies, April 21, 1993, which I attended; cited in Ahmed Noman Almadhagi, *Yemen and the United States: A Study of a Small Power and Superpower Relationship, 1962-1994* (1996: Tauris, London) p. 153.

Yemeni instance, there were already signs of schizophrenia between realpolitik and an incipient inspections regime.

The growing and increasingly professionalized transnational industry of “electricians,” so to speak, earned worldwide publicity from the landmark elections in Russia, South Africa, Palestine, and elsewhere in the mid nineties. In the Mediterranean and Yemen one could see that methodologies were refined, delegations became more diverse, permanent offices were staffed with local professionals, and a huge transnational cadre of activists, university students, and ordinary citizens were trained in the rudiments of observing techniques. Consultants for elections commissions, subsidies to Arab NGO poll-watchers, Arabic-language manuals, press coverage, and word of mouth disseminated this knowledge more widely, especially in Jordan, Morocco, Yemen, Algeria, and Egypt, and the unique fanfare surrounding the 1996 elections to the Palestinian Authority spread awareness further. In other words, both a regime and an epistemic community were recognizable.

The dramatic, virtually unprecedented Palestinian state-building exercise was a hugely ambitious, quintessentially multilateral experiment in democratic peace theory. Professionals flew in from Australia, Canada, and around the globe to help with creation of the electoral commission, constituency demarcation, voter registration, candidacy rules, time-tables and budgets, ballot design, campaign ethics, security, placement and staffing of voting stations, and a host of other preparatory tasks. The September 1995 Oslo Accords made elections an integral part of the peace process; established criteria for credentialing intergovernmental, nongovernmental, and domestic elections monitors; and designated the EU as the coordinator of all international election activities. The EU’s Election Unit alone devoted hundreds of specialist-months to drafting the electoral law, administrative arrangements, public education, and observation, sending thirty five long-term advisors who were joined by a former Swedish Minister of Justice, 300 European, and 600 other visitors for the actual balloting.⁴² The Carter Center, the National Democratic Institute, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, Associates in Rural Development, and other American foundations and contractors were also heavily involved. Palestinians in the territories got a crash course on campaigns, elections, and representation. In its immediate aftermath, the election was widely considered a great success.

Yet sovereign countries typically objected to political sightseeing expeditions. Neither the rogue republics of Ba’athi Iraq, Sudan, Libya, and Syria with their ersatz voting rituals nor the affluent Gulf monarchies with their dynastic traditions opened their politics to external scrutiny. Even debt-strapped Western clients like Egypt, which flatly refused monitoring, or Jordan, which acquiesced only gradually and grudgingly, balked. The Moroccan government initially made clear it did not want foreigners “telling them how they should, or should not, conduct their elections,” nor to be categorized with countries like Angola or Cambodia.⁴³ Governments wanted a stamp of approval: Yemeni television portrayed the foreign visitors’ handshakes with top leaders as congratulations on “success in establishing foolproof mechanisms for free and fair elections,” according to NDI,⁴⁴ and what Human Rights Watch called “lackluster and silent monitoring” of Algeria’s 1995 presidential ballot by the Arab League, Organization of African Unity, and the UN “enabled the authorities to boast of the

42 Stefan Mair, “Election Observation: Roles and Responsibilities of Long-Term Election Observers,” http://www.oneworld.org/ecdpm/pubs/wp22_gb.htm (p.6); Alicia Martin Diaz, *The Middle East Peace Process and the European Union*, European Parliament Directorate General for Research Working Paper, Political Series POLI-115EN Brussels May 1999; Commission of the European Communities, “Communication from the Commission on EU Elections Assistance and Observation,” Brussels 11.4.2000 COM (2000) 191 Final, p. 27

43 Thomas C. Bayer, *Morocco Direct Legislative Elections June 25, 1993: Report of the IFES Monitoring and Observation Delegations* (Washington, IFES: 1993). p. 9 and p. 32. On similar issues next door, see also Jeff Fischer and Clement Henry, *Pre-Election Technical Assessment, Tunisia, December 15- December 22, 1993* (Washington, IFES: 1993), p.3

44 NDI, *Promoting Participation in Yemen's 1993 Elections* (Washington, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs: 1994), p.22-25, 122-124.

international presence without having to face thorough monitoring or public reporting.”⁴⁵ Although a few countries, notably Yemen, Jordan, and Morocco, got better at following the rules, as in other fields (such as human rights) the existence of a monitoring regime does not mean universal or automatic compliance. External monitoring was typically an adversarial relationship negotiated step by step.

The New Millennium

By 2001, there was quite an Arab network of intellectuals, activists, journalists, students, and others familiar with the methodologies of elections observation. Transnational conventions became more widely appreciated, and a huge industry with bilingual franchises across the region represented a good deal of proficiency in the appraisal of plausible elections. Among the many signs were an "Arab Summit for Monitoring Elections in the Arab World" in Amman and the creation of a program and bilingual website called Arab Elections Watch to review annually elections in Arab League member countries.⁴⁶ In Morocco, as in Egypt, Yemen, and other countries, transnational agencies and their branch offices trained party officials, women voters and candidates, and electoral officials.⁴⁷ Yemenis, Algerians, Moroccans, Jordanians, and other Arabs joined delegations observing each others' balloting experiences, and the Arabic language press covered regional workshops. While some autocrats' legerdemain in emulating conventions without actually relinquishing power was notable, so, increasingly, was other countries' failure to meet even minimal criteria.

One of these was Egypt. Notwithstanding a vast international donor community including a cadre of democracy brokers, and conferences, workshops, forums, and think-tanks galore in Cairo, President Husni Mubarak and his ruling National Democratic Party routinely won laughable majorities, evaded inspection, repressed credible opposition candidates, and denied the Egyptian judiciary its constitutional right to validate elections.⁴⁸ Embarrassed by these heavy-handed shenanigans on the part of a close ally, especially after the arrest of the leading opposition candidate for president, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told an American University in Cairo audience that future Egyptian elections “must meet objective standards that define every free election” including freedom to assemble and campaign openly, the absence of violence or intimidation, and “unrestricted access” by international election monitors and observers. Such demands were disregarded by the recipient of \$1.8 billion annually in American aid, including about fifty million for good governance and \$240 million in military aid, plus a extra million dollars for pre-election activities like poll-watcher workshops. Amidst a huge debate on the pros and cons of foreign involvement, observers were barred again in 2005.⁴⁹ Yet when Mubarak scored eighty-eight percent of the vote, a State Department spokesman gave the positive spin that Egypt's first multi-candidate presidential elections marked an “historic

45 HRW, “Algeria: Elections in the Shadow of Violence and Repression,” <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1997/algeria/> ; Hugh Roberts, “Algeria's Contested Elections,” *Middle East Report* 209, 1998 (21-24).

46 Its first report was Sofie Bille & Elena Moroni, Report on Elections in the Arab World 2006 – a Human Rights Evaluation, Amman Center for Human Rights Studies, http://www.intekhabat.org/look/static/news/final_with_footnotes.pdf

47 Georges A. Fauriol, “Election Observation Standards: Establishing Election Standards Case by Case,” remarks to the American Bar Association 2007 Spring Meeting Panel on International Election Standards, The Fairmont Hotel, Washington, D.C., May 2, 2007

48 On the Judges' Club's role, see Mona El-Ghobashy, “Egypt's Paradoxical Elections,” *Middle East Report* 238, Spring 2006

49 In *al-Ahram Weekly*, just a few of the columns were Gihan Shahine, “Monitoring Plans Undeterred,” 25 - 31 August 2005 No. 757 19 - 25 May 2005 and “An ISO Certificate of Democracy,” No. 743 19 - 25 May 2005, and Magda El-Ghitany, “Observing, Not Monitoring,” 26 May - 1 June 2005, No. 744, and Amr El-Choubaki Monitoring the monitors, 25 - 31 August 2005 No. 757

departure.”⁵⁰ Industry experts, even Republican supporters of the Bush administration, bemoaned the formulaic and muted criticisms of bloody repression from the White House and distanced themselves from Washington’s willingness to greet as “reform” regressive constitutional amendments restricting judicial oversight, instituting sweeping anti-terrorism measures, and blocking outlets for peaceful opposition.⁵¹

By this time, other countries including Lebanon and Yemen had conducted elections that held up to a refined inspections rubric.⁵² An EU cadre of twenty-six long-term data-collectors, sixty-two short-term monitors, and additional representatives of the European and Spanish parliaments observed opening, polling and counting procedures in 1,308 polling stations in Lebanon in 2005. On hand, too, were a ‘Francophonie’ team, a Congressional delegation, and several hundred domestic poll-watchers. The EU’s dry, 71-page report full of details and charts, following contemporary protocol, refrained from giving thumbs-up or thumbs-down. It began: “The elections were well managed and took place in a peaceful manner within the existing framework” but also listed procedural shortcomings indicating a “need for better preparations.” This cautious, technical diction signaled that Lebanon passed thirteen hundred snap inspections, thus meeting a minimal standard.

An Electoral Turnover

Transnational protocols confounded Euro-American designs in the West Bank and Gaza in early 2006 when the party now favored by the West lost an election organized and validated by the worldwide elections complex to a party of pariahs. Despite a USAID-financed promotional campaign touting the accomplishments of the PA under Fatah,⁵³ and threats from spokesman Javier Solana to withhold EU aid the event of a Hamas victory⁵⁴ – both breaches of standards of impartiality – the Islamist opposition won control of the legislature.

There was no gainsaying the outcome. Eight hundred visitors including former American, Swedish, and French leaders, two Congressional delegations, and 27 European Parliamentarians joined over seventeen thousand domestic volunteers to watch 1.3 million voters, three quarters of the electorate. A hundred and eighty five EU auditors who sampled over 800 polling stations in 14 of the 16 electoral districts published a 7-page preliminary statement noting several problems -- delegates were kept out of two districts in Gaza, disturbances in the lead-up which “at times threatened to prevent the holding of elections,” and Israeli obstruction of some stations in East Jerusalem – but also documenting an orderly process during the campaign, registration, voting, and counting. The 48-page final report, following the same basic checklist as the report on Lebanon, analyzed relevant legislation, voter and candidate registration, access to media, campaign procedures, the role of women, voting procedures, the tallying and release of results, individual complaints by defeated candidates, and more, calling the elections “successful” and “open and fairly contested.”⁵⁵ The European Parliament’s spokesperson

50 Quoted by Jeremy M. Sharp, “Egypt: 2005 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections,” CRS Report for Congress, September 21, 2005, pp. 5-6. See also Jason Brownlee, “The Decline of Pluralism in Mubarak’s Egypt,” *Journal of Democracy* 13:4 October 2002 (6-14).

51 Joshua Muravchik, “A Democracy Policy in Ashes,” *The Washington Post*, June 27, 2006; Page A21. Andrew Exum and Zack Snyder, “Democracy Demotion in Egypt: Is the United States a Willing Accomplice?” Policy Watch #1212, March 23, 2007; Lorne Craner, “Will U.S. Democratization Policy Work?” *Middle East Quarterly* 2006 • XIII: 3

52 On Yemen’s election, see Sheila Carapico, “How Yemen’s Ruling Party Secured an Electoral Landslide,” Middle East Report On-Line, May 16, 2003, www.merip.org/mero/mero051603.html

53 Scott Wilson and Glen Kessler, “U.S. Funds Enter Fray In Palestinian Elections. Bush Administration Uses USAID as Invisible Conduit,” *Washington Post*, January 22, 2006, page A01.

54 Nathalie Tocci, “Has the EU Promoted Democracy in Palestine? And Does It Still?” CFSP Forum, 4: 2, 2006, pp. 7-10

55 European Union Election Observation Mission West Bank & Gaza 2006, Statement of Preliminary Conclusions and Findings, “Open and well-run parliamentary elections strengthen Palestinian commitment to democratic institutions,”

called them "extremely professional, in line with international standards," and even "a model for the wider Arab region."⁵⁶ The 85-member NDI/Carter Center team noted that the process was consistent with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, comparative practices for democratic elections and Palestinian law.⁵⁷

But the great powers effectively rejected the results. The Middle East "Quartet" of the UN, the US, the EU, and Russia issued a convoluted statement insisting that an elections that was "free, fair and secure" was fundamentally at odds with "the building of a democratic State."⁵⁸ The French foreign minister echoed these sentiments and demanded Hamas recognize Israel.⁵⁹ Washington urged other Quartet members to freeze aid, and, reversing previous policy, sought to fortify the Palestinian executive by training and arming a Presidential Security Guard.⁶⁰ A former U.S. diplomat called this policy erratic and convoluted.⁶¹ The EU scrambled for ways to extend humanitarian assistance that would bypass the Hamas-led government, eventually stranded in Gaza while the West sought to shore up a rump PA in the West Bank. Canada, a major donor, suspended its financial commitments. This reverse conditionality inverted the Algerian experience and contravened the technical, legalistic ethos of fair play encoded in election observation manuals and training. These inconsistencies were obvious to informed Arab publics who contrasted the Palestinian experience with the three rounds of balloting in Iraq in 2005, noting disparities in the right of exiles to vote, assessment against conventional benchmarks, conditions of law and order, the clarity of the outcome, and reactions from Washington, London, and Ottawa.

Representing Representation

Even if the advance ballyhoo for interim elections, a constitutional referendum, and parliamentary elections in Iraq during 2005 left the impression on North American audiences that Arabs had never been to voting booths, much less frequently enough to be cynical, all this balloting fell short of commonly recognized standards, Rice's advice to Egypt, Yemeni and Lebanese examples during the same period, or even Central American demonstration elections. Instead of calling in the professional transnational elections-engineering apparatus – the experts – it was an amateurish, politicized process that demonstrated the disjuncture between unilateralism and the elections regime.

(Contd.) _____

Jerusalem, 26 January 2006. See also the press release of the Members of the European Parliament, "MEPs oversee historic Palestinian election, January 30, 2006,

<http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/db942872b9eae454852560f6005a76fb/bf365670d4e9b8d98525714000675fc5!OpenDocument>

56 European Union Election Observation Mission West Bank & Gaza, 'Statement of Preliminary Conclusions and Findings', Jerusalem, 26 January 2006.

57 Preliminary Statement of the NDI/Carter Center International Observer Delegation to the Palestinian Legislative Council Elections, 26 Jan 2006 <http://www.cartercenter.org/doc2283.htm>. For a technical analysis of the "mixed" system's effects, see Jarrett Blanc, "Palestinian Election Analysis: How Hamas Won the Majority," February 20, 2006, <http://www.ifes.org/features.html?title=How%20Hamas%20Won%20the%20Majority>

58 Secretary-General SG/2103 PAL/2041, "Statement on Palestinian Elections by Middle East Quartet, January 26, 2006 <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sg2103.doc.htm>

59 France Diplomatie, "Palestinian Elections, January 25, 2006, at http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files_156/israel-palestinian-territories_290/palestinian-territories_2156/events_2759/palestinian-elections-january-25-2006_3783.html

60 It was a genuine legal conundrum, as analyzed by Aaron D. Pina, "Palestinian Elections," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, February 9, 2006, and Tim Youngs, "The Palestinian Parliamentary Elections and the Rise of Hamas," Research Paper 06/17, House of Commons Library, London, 15 March 2006. And a mistaken, vacillating policy, according to Keir Prince, "Palestinian Authority Reform: Role of the International Community," *Arab Reform Bulletin*, November 2007, 5:9,

61 Philip C. Wilcox, Jr., "U.S. Policy and Palestine: Reform and Peace are Interdependent," *Arab Reform Bulletin* November 2006, 4: 9

The breakneck electoral timetable 2005 was dictated by the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), a quasi-constitutional document itself written hastily in time for the nominal transfer of power which imposed deadlines that in turn determined the electoral system outlined in the Coalition Provisional Authority's Order 96 of June, 2004. The at-large constituency system for the 275-member Transitional National Assembly, eighteen Governorate Councils and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan National Assembly was said to have been recommended by UN experts as the most expedient. By contrast, the CPA had argued that locality-based representation would require a current census or sophisticated mapping.⁶² But since voters were handed two (in Kurdistan, three) ballots color-coded to distinguish between national and provincial (or regional) slates, the simplicity argument was spurious. Instead many raconteurs deduced it was designed to sweep the incumbents, former exiles appointed by the UN at the behest of the CPA, who had national and international visibility but no local constituencies, back into office.⁶³ For one thing, in sharp contrast to Palestinian elections open only to West Bank and Gaza residents, polling stations abroad bolstered *in absentia* voting.⁶⁴ Moreover, during the abbreviated campaign, threats of violence necessitated keeping secret the names of most of the 7000 candidates on a bewildering array of ninety-eight separate slates.⁶⁵ To make matters worse, the nationwide-constituency system exacerbated the consequences of a boycott in central Iraq, leaving the so-called "Sunni Triangle" grossly under-represented in the assembly seated three months after the election was held.

To be sure, some cosmopolitan know-how was brought to bear by European and United Nations personnel advising from the Green Zone or Amman; Canadian, Japanese and German out-of-country training for elections officials; and other nations' facilitation of expatriate voter-registration. The European Commission donated over 30 million euros to cover the costs for thirty-five UN staffers, sent three European elections specialists, and provided training and advice.⁶⁶ But neither the UN, citing its role in preparing the elections, nor the EU, citing security concerns, nor the OECD, fresh from its leading role in the Ukrainian elections, was prepared to send observer missions into the maelstrom.⁶⁷ In December 2004 Elections Canada convened an Iraq Election Monitoring Forum, co-sponsored by the UN and the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq, at which was founded an International Mission for Iraqi Elections (IMIE) to be led by a steering committee of elections officials from over a dozen countries as well as the Arab League.⁶⁸

62 This was disputed by an Iraqi blogger who contended that the eighteen provinces were already divided into about 7000 districts and sub-districts, which were the locations of polling stations: "Iraq Letters, Democracy Not Elections," Sunday, December 26, 2004 <http://iraquna.blogspot.com/2004/12/democracy-not-elections.html> (June 28, 2007).

63 Tareq Y. Ismael; Jacqueline S. Ismael, "Whither Iraq? Beyond Saddam, sanctions and Occupation," *Third World Quarterly*, 26: 4-5, pp 609 – 629, 2005, pp.626-627; for a similar conclusion from a different political perspective, see Pollack, "A Switch in Time," pp.87-89; and Patrick Clawson, "Forward Progress," *New Republic Online*, December 15, 2005.

64 According to the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq's complex ICEI Regulation 10/2004 Out of Country Registration and Voting, http://www.iraqiein.org/english/election%20rule_files/rules/IECI%20Reg%2010-04%20-%20OCR%20-%20final.pdf

65 Carl Conetta authored a damning 29-page critique, "*The Iraqi election "bait and switch: Faulty poll will not bring peace or US withdrawal,"* Project for Defense Alternatives Briefing Report #17, 25 January 2005. See also Juan Cole, "Informed Comment," <http://www.juancole.com/2005/01/mixed-story-im-just-appalled-by.html> . According to Seymour M. Hersch, "Did Washington Try to Manipulate Iraq's Election?" in *The New Yorker* 25 July 2005, senior UN officials in Baghdad warned that the planned voting would not meet international standards.

66 "European Union Biggest Donor for Iraq's Elections and Referendum," IP/05/1323 Brussels, 21 October, 2005; Jonathan Spyer, "Europe and Iraq: Test Case for the Common Foreign and Security Policy," *MERIA Journal* V.11, N.2 (June 2007); "European Union Biggest Donor for Iraq's Elections and Referendum," IP/05/1323 Brussels, 21 October 2005

67 Mark Turner in New York and Roula Khalaf , "UN diplomats warn over Iraqi election monitoring," *Financial Times*, January 20 2005; Peter Beaumont, "Fresh doubts over Iraq elections," *The Observer*, Sunday December 5, 2004.

68 Elections Canada Press Release, "Establishment of an International Mission for Iraqi Elections," December 20, 2004, at http://www.imie.ca/media_dec1305.htm (December 29, 2005)

Amidst increasing chaos, IMIE could send only one foreigner to observe in-country balloting by 14 million Iraqis in January 2005.⁶⁹ No established professional organizations issued reports. An Iraqi Election Information Network (EIN), acknowledging assistance from NDI, the UN, and the EU, issued two cell-phone messages from its 10,000 members and concluded that “despite problems which can be considered modest under the circumstances, the election appears to have been conducted without systemic flaws and in accordance with basic international standards.”⁷⁰ Topping this, London’s DFID glowed that “ordinary Iraqis bravely took to the polls” on an “historic occasion, marking a highly significant stage in Iraq’s political process. The high level of participation demonstrated that the majority of Iraqis support the political process, even in the face of violence and intimidation.”⁷¹ But a columnist for *Al-Ahram Weekly* wrote of “the congenital defect of a sloppy election conceived by, and under, military occupation and lacking even the façade of any international body that might guarantee its legitimacy.”⁷²

Iraqis got to vote yeah or nay on a constitution finalized just in time for the TAL-imposed deadline of October 15, with just days for the nationwide public deliberations that ought to have preceded the vote.⁷³ An American group called the Next Century Foundation, which identified itself as “the only international observers operating at large in the interior of Iraq” fielded a small team whose brief statement noted some irregularities but called the exercise honest, fair, credible, and an “accurate reflection” of the views of the Iraqi people.⁷⁴ Perhaps; but contrary to professional protocols they did not explain their methodology.

The system of representation was redesigned for the December 15, 2005 National Assembly elections. Groups including the Education for Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC, founded in 1998 in Washington, and associated with the anti-war camp) had called for, and the UN provided consultants to help craft a new two-tiered system with 230 provincial seats and 45 national-constituency seats representing, *inter alia*, overseas voters. An advisor to Iraq’s electoral commission labeled it a “strange pseudo-compensatory hybrid” system.⁷⁵ Based on a mind-boggling mathematical formula, it was rather too complex implementation on three month’s notice, even though illustrated brochures and posters were distributed to explain it to the public.⁷⁶

69 Robin Wright, in “No Foreign Observers to Monitor Iraq Vote,” *The Washington Post*, January 22, 2005; Page A12. According to Barbara Slavin, “In Iraq, setting election date the easiest part,” USA TODAY, 11/23/2004, whereas the U.N. deployed 266 election workers for the Afghan elections, there were only 10 U.N. staffers a month before the elections in Iraq, expected to increase to 25 in December.

70 The Iraqi Election Information Network (EIN), Statement on Electoral and Counting Processes, available at http://www.ndi.org/ndi/library/1802_iq_einstatement_020605.txt (June 22, 2007) and Iraqi Election Information Network (EIN), Preliminary Statement on the January 30, 2005 Iraqi Election, http://www.ndi.org/ndi/library/1798_einstatement_013005.txt

71 “Elections in Iraq,” Department for International Development, Iraq Update Issue 6, February 2005

72 Sinan Antoon, “Democracy and Necrology,” *Al-Ahram Weekly* 27 January - 2 February 2005 No. 727

73 For details, see *Unmaking Iraq: A Constitutional Process Gone Awry* International Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°19, 26 September 2005

74 “Statement from the Next Century Foundation: International Observers of the Referendum for Iraq’s Constitution”, 3 November 2005, <http://nextcenturyfoundation.blogspot.com>; see also Next Century Foundation: <http://www.ncfpeace.org> (December 10, 2005). The photograph of “the NCF delegation” shows twenty individuals in civilian and military dress.

75 Jarrett Blanc, “Rules Do Matter: What the Iraqi and Palestinian Elections Tell Us,” http://www.democracyatlarge.org/vol2_no2/vol2_no2_rules.htm

Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “Iraq Elections,” criticizing Iraqi lawmakers for “crafting” a system voters might not understand: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1100185192552>

The convoluted two-step system was explained by Adeed Dawisha and Larry Diamond, “Iraq’s Year of Voting Dangerously,” *Journal of Democracy* 17: 2, 2006, pp. 89-103, on pp. 95-96.

More local sentinels were deployed than in January, thanks largely to workshops by USAID, NDI and IFES, and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.⁷⁷ EIN, the coalition of Iraqi NGOs, would issue more testimonials compiled from its 14,000 poll-watchers on Election Day.⁷⁸ Trainings and trainer-trainings utilizing widely available Arabic-language manuals and the cell-phone trees activated for communications constituted a kind of “epistemic network” in which Iraqis joined tens of thousands of other Arabic speakers trained to recognize the hallmarks of a properly run election.

As Prime Minister Tony Blair had before the January elections, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney each flew to Baghdad with camera crews in tow. A big to-do was made of purple fingers as an indicator of mass acclamation. Collective review relied on unusual, ad-hoc arrangements, however. IMIE deployed nearly 400 people to witness overseas voting in fifteen countries.⁷⁹ About 800 or 850 foreigners were accredited by Iraq’s electoral commission; they were able to visit polling stations in Baghdad, Basra, and Kurdistan.⁸⁰ IMIE conceded that they were “recruited mainly from in-country international organizations and embassies” and that the “absence of a more extensive international observer presence” in light of safety issues “put a special burden on ... domestic monitors.”⁸¹ In the end, indeed perhaps prematurely, and contrary to industry conventions, the head of the 50-person UN team, citing some 120,000 Iraqi poll workers and watchers nationwide, reassured journalists that voting had been “transparent and credible.” But this was the defense of the architect, not the finding of the inspector.

Actually, the process was rife with irregularities and violence. The massive military deployment and the deep involvement of Anglo-American forces raised red flags, and there were credible reports of intimidation by various security forces.⁸² In response to numerous complaints, and amidst calls for a boycott of the new parliament by a coalition of several dozen disgruntled Iraqi parties, IMIE sent two Arabs, a Canadian, and a European to Iraq in late December to investigate.⁸³ Other rumors of malfeasance circulated.⁸⁴ Also, since the scheduled concurrent elections to Provincial Councils were not held the whole process was not even quite constitutional. Moreover, a government was only formed after five months of behind-the-scenes politicking. All together, it looked to the authors of the 1984 book entitled *Demonstration Elections* like a bad remake. Citing strife, the closure of *al-Jazeera* in Baghdad, and other campaign-season irregularities, one of them wrote of the “calculated use of

77 Federal Foreign Office, “German Assistance in Stabilizing and Reconstructing Iraq,” <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/diplo/en/Aussenpolitik/RegionaleSchwerpunkte/Irak/WiederaufbauIrak.html#t4> (June 20, 2007)

78 For instance EIN Press Release December 15, 2005, at http://www.ndi.org/ndi/library/1967_iq_ein_121505.txt, and another December 15, The One Hour Extension of the Voting Time Results in Chaos during the Polling Center Closing, at http://www.ndi.org/ndi/library/1968_iq_ein_121605.txt

79 International Mission for Iraqi Elections, “IMIE Releases Preliminary Statement on Iraq OCV,” December 16, 2005; on the post-facto monitoring, Patrick Quinn, “International Team to Review Iraq Results,” *The Washington Post*, December 30, 2005

80 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “Iraq Elections,” <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1100185192552> Jeff Fisher, “Council of Representatives Election Composite Report, Iraq, December 15, 2005 Final Report,” IFES Center for Transitional and Post-Conflict Justice, Washington, February 20, 2006, offered a 21-page analysis of turnout, complaints, and other factors but not a full report.

81 IMIE Assessment Team Final Report, January 19, 2006, p. 5 of 11.

82 United Press International, “Coercion Marred Iraqi Elections,” Dec. 20, 2005. On forms of intimidation, see also Jonathan Finer, “In Iraq, Signs of Political Evolution,” *Washington Post* December 8, 2005

83 International Mission for Iraqi Elections, “IMIE Releases Preliminary Statement on Iraq OCV,” December 16, 2005; on the post-facto monitoring, Patrick Quinn, “International Team to Review Iraq Results,” *The Washington Post*, December 30, 2005

84 The Project on Defense Alternatives, “Masque of Democracy: Iraqi Election System Still Disfavors Sunni Arabs, Favors Kurds.” PDA Briefing Memo #35, 10 December 2005. See also Omar Fekeiki and Jonathan Finer, “Iraqi Political Parties Threaten a Boycott, Coalition Demands New Elections,” *Washington Post*, December 23, 2005; Page A18

voter turnout as a measure of approval of the election and occupation itself, with the opposition of rebels serving as the dramatic counterpart of the contest.”⁸⁵

Near Babel

This paper has exposed multiple contradictions. Western leaders favor form over substance in some cases and substance over form in others. Coups, electoral high jinks, arbitrary appointments, and make-believe choices can be passed off as democratic in the name of countering terrorism. For all the expertise in electoral design, one would have expected higher quality engineering in Iraq. Instead the arrangement mimicked some of the peculiarities of the French-designed Lebanese sectarian system and matched an Arab narrative about divide-and-rule neo-colonialism. The multimillion dollar advertising blitz portraying Iraq as a shining example of electoral democracy was mocked by Vladimir Putin and the Arabic language media. This was not about Arab rejection of proper electoral procedures and norms, but, rather, about dashed expectations that the exemplars of those norms would practice what they preach. The simulation elections in Iraq topped off widespread, hard-earned public incredulity about Western claims to want free and fair elections in the Middle East.

Another paradox concerns the antagonism between superpower ambitions and the written codes of the electoral game. Funded from Washington, Ottawa, Brussels, Stockholm, and other capitals of the North-West core, the elections industry, or regime, is something besides just sugar-coated neo-colonialism; it is not an instrument consistently serving hegemonic interests. The tension between unilateralism and multilateralism felt before and during the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq reappeared in the Iraqi and Palestinian elections as double standards. The West – or is it the North – speaks out of both sides of its mouth. Also the UN both is and is not a tool of American policy. Then again, on a slightly different note, it is one thing to hand elections over to professionals, and quite another to hurry things along with slipshod craftsmanship. At the very least, then, it is important not to conflate democracy promotion and American foreign policy. They are two quite different things, and short of Iraq one cannot distinguish the effects of American programs from the collective influence of a larger consortium of democracy promoters. A clear distinction should also be made between the highfalutin homilies apologists like to think temper American hegemonic ambitions and far clearer codified conventions, practices, and expectations.

A third irony has to do with the partly antagonistic relationship between Arab governments, especially perhaps the “moderate” dependencies like Egypt, Jordan, and Algeria, and their external benefactors. One way of putting this is that pro-Western Arab incumbents are rational actors like anybody else, and selectively mouth the slogans and embrace the practices of electoral democracy in the construction of a self-aggrandizing illusion that emulates what their mentors do rather than what they say. This presents us with an ethical paradox inasmuch as Euro-American interference in Arab elections would be easier to criticize if it were not resisted by despots defending decidedly anti-democratic practices.

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85 Quoted, Edward S. Herman, “The Election in Iraq: The U.S. Propaganda System is Still Working in High Gear,” ZNet Iraq, February 13, 2006; also, Frank Brodhead, “Reframing the Iraq Election,” ZNet Iraq, January 21, 2005