

Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Arab World by Nicola Christine Pratt. Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006. Cloth, \$55.00; paper, \$22.00.

Nicola Pratt provides a thorough analysis of a very complex subject. The book is without doubt required reading for policy and opinion makers who seek an objective and enlightened outcome and broader perspectives on their contributions. Pratt's wealth of informed analysis and her commitment to precision are strong incentives for scholars to further expand their research on the subject.

But while reading this book, a nagging feeling persisted that the circumstantial and historical underpinnings of emergent Arab nationalism might not have been sufficiently and adequately addressed here, given the determinant role they played in the current predicaments that confront Arabs. Perhaps this lacuna explains a slight discrepancy in an integrated approach that would seek to explain the many dilemmas that Arab civil societies confront and, as the author rightly asserts, the problematique of democracy and authoritarianism. For example, the preponderance of Western sources used by Pratt-notwithstanding that many are credible and sympathetic-did not equally acknowledge the wealth of United Nations Development Program Arab Human Development Reports and publications of the Arab Unity Center and the Institute of Palestine Studies, among others.

Suffice to say that nationalism to the Arabs was primarily a function of liberation and not an ideology in itself. Arab nationalism that followed the breakup of the Ottoman Empire confronted multiple colonial powers and disparate levels of foreign control. This led Arab nationalists during the twentieth century to accept the reality of what ultimately became the Arab League "state system" but not to submit to its inevitable permanence. Perhaps this was one of the causes for the fragmentation of Arab civil societies; but also for the persistent networking among Arab nationalists reflected by the ongoing urge for some form of Arab unity,

With the liberal values of the mainstream nationalist movements, there was also a prevailing conviction that unity takes precedence over individual liberties. While prioritizing national liberation and postponing democratic freedoms, commitment to the realization of such freedoms actually persisted. This negates the assertions frequently referred to in the book by authors such as Daniel Pipes, Samuel Huntington, Elie Kedourie, and particularly Bernard Lewis, whose writings deliberately sought to assert that Arab culture is alien to democracy and liberalism.

The exceptional experience that Arab nationalist movements faced was the all-encompassing confrontation with the Zionist project and consequently with Israel. The jolting experience of the successful creation of Israel brought a sense of collective humiliation and a belief that the West was expiating its guilt in the aftermath of the Holocaust at the expense of Palestinian rights. The reward of independence was mitigated in part by the failure of the Arab states to play an effective role in the 1948 war.

It is because of this sense of national malaise in the Arab world that a degree of permissiveness toward military coups evolved and was tolerated by large sectors of Arab civil societies. Shortcuts to progress claimed by coup leaders frustrated and successfully marginalized democratic and liberal values and traditions. Only the coup in Egypt, dubbed the "July 23 Revolution," endured, not only in terms of governance, but also in assuming the leadership of a revived Arab nationalist commitment after the Suez Crisis,

The policy that Nasser articulated demonstrated that independence was far more than the outer attributes of sovereignty; it was an assertion of independent judgments, especially in the bipolar global system that existed. Nasser's leadership in the non-aligned movement made "hegemonic" tendencies spontaneous, and thus authoritarian powers were willingly delegated to Nasser's regime.

Charismatic leadership is no substitute for democratic institutions. While it can mobilize, the outcome usually culminates in an exercise of absolute power. It is worth noting that most Arab regimes experience serious challenges from the newly emboldened civil society activists-though their influence remains in a state of flux, as elaborated by the author. In the aftermath of the UN sponsored international conferences in the nineties that culminated in the Millennium Declaration in May of 2000, Arab civil societies started to exert growing influence, although still with no prospect of an early exercise of serious democratic power.

I offer these observations to complement the content of this impressive book and to compliment the author's diligent research, which renders her book a significant addition to our knowledge and a contribution to understanding Arab human evolution at a moment when the Arab region is in the throes of managing complexity in order to avoid chaos.

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