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Will the 21st century be the democratic century?

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In June 1685, Colonel Richard Rumbold, an unreconstructed leader of the Levellers, was about to be hung, drawn and quartered, for his role in the Rye House Plot against Charles II. In his last moments, he said, 'I am sure there was no Man born marked of God above another; for none comes into the World with a Saddle on his Back, neither any Booted and Spurred to ride to him'. That vision lies at the heart of the democratic ideal, although it has never been fully realized. Democracy began in 5th century Athens. The word itself derives from the Greek words 'demos' and 'kratos', meaning rule by the people; and democracy began, according to the political philosopher, John Dunn, 'as an improvised remedy for a very local Greek difficulty two and a half thousand years ago'. The Greeks, however, held a very limited view of who was entitled to be involved in decision-making. Only male citizens could participate; women and slaves were excluded. But for those who were entitled to participate, more was required than is asked of those of us living in modern democracies. For the Athenians practised, not representative democracy, but direct democracy in which all the male citizens gathered together to make decisions for the city. Such direct democracy still survives in four small cantons in Switzerland, in town meetings in the United States, and, in an attenuated form, in some parish meetings in England. The Greeks participated in their government on a continuous and regular basis. Today, by contrast, our participation is very limited indeed. If we are lucky enough to live long lives, we will vote around sixteen times at national level and perhaps around fifty times in local elections – activities which probably take up around two hours of our time in total, about half the time that many of us spend watching television every day.

Although the democratic ideal has never been fully realized, representative democracy made great strides in the latter half of the 20th century, which seemed to witness the global triumph of democracy. That was a striking contrast with the first half of the 20th century. In 1926, there were just 26 democracies amongst the nations of the world. These democracies came under threat after the Great Depression of 1929. Under the impact of Fascism and National Socialism, the frontiers of democracy came to be pushed back. In 1931, when Spain returned, temporarily as it turned out, to parliamentary government, Mussolini declared that it was like returning to oil lamps in the age of electricity. In 1934, Antonio Salazar, the dictator of Portugal, said, 'I am convinced that within twenty years, if there is not some retrograde movement in political evolution, there will be no legislative assemblies left in Europe'. By 1940, it was an open question whether democracy could survive in the west, or indeed at all. After the fall of France, Churchill declared that if Britain were to fail in her resistance to Nazi Germany, 'then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age'. By 1942, there were only 12 democracies left. But, with the defeat of Hitler, democracy revived as a form of government. The last two decades of the 20th century saw two waves of democratization – in Latin America in the 1980s and in Eastern Europe, following the collapse of Communism, in the 1990s – and also, though less noticed, in Africa, where 30 ruling parties or leaders have been ousted by voters since 1991. Possibly the Arab spring may herald a further wave of democratization, although at present it is much too early to tell.

By the time of the millennium, 120 out of the 192 members of the United Nations could be classed as democracies. The American monitoring organisation, Freedom House, claims that there are now 115 'electoral democracies', that is, countries where the government is chosen in free and competitive multi-party elections. Of these 115, however, 27 are only 'partly free' in the sense that the judiciary is

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not wholly independent, the press is not wholly free, and there is widespread corruption. Nevertheless, by contrast with the inter-war years, democracy has come to be the norm to which it is believed that all civilized countries should aspire.

The triumph of democracy reflects, I believe, an American rather than a British view of the world. Americans have tended to believe what many British leaders have doubted, that all people want what America has – a democratic system of government, a system not necessarily based on the specific institutions of the American model, but a government in which the people can choose their leaders. In the early 20th century, this belief was given powerful expression by Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States from 1913 to 1921. Wilson was, incidentally, the only American president to have been a professional academic before entering politics; and he was a professor of political science. Perhaps that is the basis for my admiration of him.

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Wilson is now best remembered, perhaps unfairly, for failing to secure American participation in the League of Nations after the First World War, something which might well have prevented the Second World War. During the campaign to try to secure American participation, Wilson took his case to the country. In a speech in San Francisco in September 1919, he gave powerful expression to the belief that democracy was a form of government suited not merely to a small number of nations in the west, but something to which all people aspired. He once said that when he thought about the peoples of the world, he wasn't thinking of men in dinner jackets. In San Francisco, he asked a probably startled audience, 'Do you know where Azerbaijan is?' He then went on, 'Well, one day there came in a very dignified and interesting group of gentlemen from Azerbaijan. I did not have time until they were gone to find out where they came from, but I did find this out immediately, that I was talking to men who talked the same language that I did in respect of ideas, in respect of conceptions of liberty, in respect of conceptions of right and justice —'. And he continued, 'And I did find this out, that the Azerbaijanis were, with all the other delegations that came to see me, metaphorically speaking, holding their hands out to America and saying, "You are the disciples and leaders of the free world; can't you come and help us?" ' Wilson, then, believed that the Azerbaijanis, people from a far-away and distant land, shared the same ideals as Americans, and wanted a similar form of government to that which Americans enjoyed. Wilson believed, indeed, that all peoples sought democracy.

Wilson set in train a world-wide dynamic of political independence and personal freedom which persists today. This, in my view, makes him the most influential statesman of the 20th century. Many have thought that the Russian revolution was the most significant event of the 20th century. But Woodrow Wilson's vision has outlasted Lenin's. Wilson also put forward the idea of a world order which would protect democracy and personal freedom. He believed that democracy was not self-sustaining, but needed continuous protection by the concerted efforts of all civilized people. That was why he was such a strong believer in a League of Nations as a league of states which owed their existence to the consent of the governed. The League of Nations, of course, proved in practice to be far from that ideal. The United Nations is also far from it. Both organizations include all functioning states in it, whether the governments of these states owe their existence to the consent of the people or not. But in recent years ideas have resurfaced of a League of Democracies, a return to Wilson's original conception.

Many British politicians have held that Wilson was too idealistic. They have held what they believed was a more realistic view, that cultural habits are various and that the system of government appropriate for one country might not be suitable for another with quite different traditions and values. Therefore, democracy is not necessarily suitable for all peoples. Wilson's view, which was also, I believe, held by the younger Bush, was seen as a form of cultural imperialism. If the United States sought to influence other countries to conform to democratic norms, according to the view of many in Britain and in other European countries, it would be imposing its own ideals upon different cultures. It would be failing to respect different cultures and different ways of life. Many believed that America's failure in the Vietnam War showed the folly of such cultural imperialism, which was presciently satirized in Graham Greene's novel, *The Quiet American*, published in 1955, shortly before America escalated her involvement in Vietnam. America's failure in Vietnam persuaded Henry Kissinger to react against the whole Wilsonian conception of international relations, insisting that countries such as the Soviet Union and China could become partners in a stable international system, even if their systems of government did not meet the norms of liberal democracy. In Britain, the realist view meant that governments sought good relationships with Arab dictatorships on the ground that, whatever their defects, they at least yielded some sort of stability. Along with this went the view that perhaps democracy was not suitable for the Arab world – a view which seems to me closer to cultural imperialism than Woodrow Wilson's conception of international relations.

Recently in Britain, there has been a debate, particularly marked perhaps in the Conservative Party, between 'realists' and 'interventionists', a debate that, as a result of the successful UN resolution on Libya, seems to have been

won, for the time being at any rate by the interventionists. Woodrow Wilson would, I think, have approved.

For the question we all have to answer is whether Woodrow Wilson was right in his belief that all peoples seek democracy, and that the policies of countries such as Britain and America should be to encourage it around the world. For much of the 20th century, when democracy was struggling to survive, many would have said that he was wrong. But now, with the world-wide expansion of democracy, we cannot be so sure. For anyone who now rejects democracy seems to exclude himself or herself from the world of civilized political discourse. In our globalized world, the idea of democracy seems finally to have triumphed.

But until very recently there was one area that seemed the great exception to the wave of democratization. That was the Middle East, and, in particular, the Arab world. In that part of the world, dictatorship, not democracy, was the norm. In 2010, the governments in power in Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Tunisia were the same governments that had ruled since at least 1990. The Middle East seemed impervious to the spread of democracy, to the trends of the last part of the 20th century.

It is sometimes argued that Islam is an inherently authoritarian religion, that its precepts are somehow intrinsically authoritarian. That this is an absurd contention is proved by the fact that the largest Muslim country in the world – namely Indonesia – is currently a well-functioning democracy, though it has been democratic only since 1999. Turkey also has a democratic system. It seems unlikely, then, that there is any inherent conflict between Islam and democracy.

Moreover, although democracy seemed an alien growth in the Middle East, support for democratic ideals appeared quite widespread amongst the peoples of the Middle East. In a survey conducted in 2006 in Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait and the Palestinian Authority, no fewer than 86% agreed that 'despite the drawbacks, democracy is the best system of government'. 90% agreed with the proposition that 'having a democratic system of government in our country would be good'. Cross-regional comparisons by social scientists show that support for democracy in the Arab world is as high as or even higher than in other regions of the world.

Until the Arab spring, however, there were only three democracies in the Middle East – Israel, Turkey and Iraq - and democracy in Turkey was perhaps a tenuous growth, having twice in the post-war period been interrupted by periods of military rule. There has only been continuous democratic rule in Turkey since 1983. Iraq is a democracy imposed by American and British arms, and rent by deep divisions between Shia, Sunnis and Kurds. Lebanon can also possibly be counted as a democracy, though an extremely shaky one. The other Arab states were ruled either by absolute monarchs in the oil-rich states of the Arabian Peninsula, and in Morocco and Jordan; or, as in countries such as Egypt and Libya, by the military under single party rule, or as in Syria, by a kind of hereditary dictatorship. Paradoxically, perhaps, the absolute monarchies have been more liberal than the military dictatorships. The worst of the dictatorships in the Middle East is, without a doubt, the Syrian regime. Freedom House puts it in the category of one of the 18 most repressive regimes in the world, 'the worst of the worst'.

During the Arab spring, we have seen revolutions in Tunisia, in Egypt and in Libya, an uprising, so far unsuccessful, in Bahrain and a civil war in Syria. Other countries in the region – Morocco, Jordan and the Gulf States – have introduced reforms in order to anticipate democratic pressures. It is perhaps significant that the revolutions that have so far occurred, with the exception of that in Bahrain, have been in the military dictatorships, not the monarchies, where the legitimacy of the regime seems to be rather greater than it is in the countries subject to military rule.

But until very recently there was one area that seemed the great exception to the wave of democratization. That was the Middle East, and, in particular, the Arab world.

One important reason for the revolutions of 2011 is that dictatorship, sometimes claimed to be more 'efficient' than democracies, has not brought economic progress. Indeed, the standard of living in the non-oil Arab states other than Tunisia is the lowest in the world with the exception of sub-Saharan Africa. In oil-rich Saudi Arabia, 40% of the young have no job, and of those that do, nearly half earn less than £500 a month. Standards of literacy are also low – Morocco, which is 96th out of 120 in the UN's Human Poverty index, has an illiteracy rate of 45%, Egypt's rate is 34%, Algeria's 24% and Tunisia's 23%. The level of literacy in Morocco is lower than that in Sudan, Haiti or Rwanda. And, as we have seen, the leaders did not share the low standard of living of their peoples. Just a mile from where I live, in Hampstead, there is a multi-million pound mansion owned by one of the sons of Colonel Gaddafi; and we have seen that many institutions, including, shamefully, universities whose academics had sought to boycott Israel, paid court to Gaddafi in order to secure money, money which would have been better used to raise the standard of living of the Libyan people.

The Arab spring has aroused hopes, perhaps excessive hopes. In May this year, William Hague, the British Foreign Secretary described it as the most significant event of the 21st century so far – more strategically significant than 9/11 in 2001 or the financial crisis of 2008. But I think the term 'Arab spring' is best avoided for the time being at least. The Moroccan Foreign Minister wrote in *Le Monde* in March in relation to Egypt and Syria that there is 'no guarantee' that the Arab spring will lead to an Arab summer and that a 'sobering winter' is an equally likely scenario. It does not do to be over-optimistic. Many were optimistic when the Shah of Iran's dictatorship was overthrown in 1979. But that led not to democracy but to a new dictatorship worse than the one that had preceded it. Some commentators appear to believe that democracy is secured by just one free election. But that is not the case. Democracy requires more than even a series of elections. It also means respect and freedom for opposition parties, free access to the press and other media, an independent judiciary with the power to check arbitrary government, civilian control of the armed forces, the removal of the military from politics, and, above all, respect for human rights. A well-functioning democracy cannot exist without respect for the rule of law. It is worth remembering that the Nazi Party gained power after becoming the largest party in Germany in free elections, and that, in 1980, Iranians voted happily for a theocratic republic in which human rights have come to be non-existent to such an extent that, recently, a Muslim who converted to Christianity was sentenced to death. And of course the success of Hamas in just one election in Gaza in 2006 is certainly not sufficient for us to be able to call Gaza a democracy. If there is, in fact, an Arab spring – and that, as I have indicated, is a highly debatable proposition – Hamas is certainly not a part of it. The state of public opinion revealed by a single election when public opinion is highly volatile and political parties badly organized is quite insufficient to determine whether or not a democratic culture has taken root. One will probably not be in a position to be even reasonably confident about the survival of democracy until there have been at least two further free elections held under normal conditions.

In stable democracies, political parties are strongly rooted in civil society amidst a dense network of organized communities and pressure groups. But civil society is still very much in its infancy in the Arab states. The electors are, inevitably, rootless and liable to rapid swings of mood and shifts of allegiance. At least as important as free elections is the establishment of a securely based civil society. It is possible, of course, that, as in Eastern Europe after Communism, the experience of dictatorship in the Arab world will prove to have had a purging effect, inoculating those living under it against dictatorship in any form. It may be that the very process of resistance to dictatorship and the overthrow of dictatorial regimes by the people has constituted a basic training in democratic processes. The uprisings may have been, as it were, schools of democracy, socializing the people to new norms. It is remarkable and perhaps insufficiently noticed that the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia have been on the whole non-violent, and that the uprising in Syria began as non-violent until it was met with violent repression by the authorities. So there are reasons for optimism. But what is clear is that democratic institutions depend upon a democratic civic culture, and that such a civic culture is still to be established in the Arab world.

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The signs are not unequivocally hopeful. In Libya, the leader of the Libyan Transitional Council said, shortly after the uprising against Gaddafi began, that a law on banning polygamy, passed under Gaddafi, should be repealed so that men would be allowed to have four wives, as is currently the case in Iran. The leader of the Council also said that other *Sharia* laws should be enforced in Libya. One of the first actions of the Islamists in Tunisia who won the first free elections was to repeal an adoption law passed under Ben Ali since, under *Sharia* law, there can be no adoption. The new regime in Tunisia has also sought to censor the media so as to prevent them showing material that is, in its view, harmful to Islam. In Egypt, also, the Islamists want to remove the western-based laws of Mubarak; while the military government ordered women protesting against their rule to go through a virginity test on the grounds that anyone opposing it must be a prostitute! In Saudi Arabia, in September, King Abdullah issued a historic decree granting women the right to vote, although women will not be able to vote in local elections for another four years, and any female members of the appointed parliament will have to be chauffeured to the building since they are not allowed to drive. Two days after the king issued this decree, a judge in Jeddah sentenced a 19 year-old woman to ten lashes for the crime of driving a car, even though she held an international driving licence, and even though there is no formal law in Saudi Arabia banning women from driving. The king later granted her clemency. But this was a matter for his discretion. Such measures, it is only fair to point out, are opposed by progressive Islamic thinkers, and are by no means representative of Islam, only of an extreme version of it. Last week I heard a brave Iranian human rights activist speak at Chatham House. She ended her talk by quoting from the prophet Mohammed. 'A state will last even if it's an unbeliever, but it will not last if it is unjust'.

So it is clear that elections are not sufficient to ensure that the Arab spring leads to well-functioning democratic

government. Constitutional checks are also necessary. In a speech in June at Chatham House, an Egyptian Ambassador at Large, Mr Nabil Fahmy, said that 'to be able to evaluate whether we succeed or not is not going to be a function of the first election, frankly. It's going to be a function of whether we are able to put together the checks and balances in our societies that will make the ultimate result – politically, economically and socially – representative of the widespread aspiration of our people'. He was absolutely right. What is clear is that for democracy to be effective and to survive, power needs to lie, not with the people, nor with the legislature, but with the constitution. That is well understood by some.

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In July, 27 advocacy groups in Egypt issued a document on basic constitutional provisions calling for the separation of powers and an independent judiciary. In place of the current constitution which makes *Sharia* law the basic source of law, it emphasizes pluralism and argues that Egypt's 'multiplicity of religions, sects, confessions, ethnicities and cultures — is the most significant source of the richness and distinction of Egyptian identity'. The document outlines a bill of rights and discusses the establishment of a school curriculum to educate citizens for democracy and also the need for transitional safeguards until 'a democratic system is firmly established in Egypt, perhaps over the next 20 years'. This is a most sophisticated document that augurs well for the future of democracy in Egypt. In a statement in June this year, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies criticized those seeking retribution against members of the old regime, and stated that 'guarantees for a fair trial, which all defendants in all cases must enjoy, are particularly important in the cases involving the deposed president, regime figures and security personnel. These guarantees, most important the presumption of innocence, are of the utmost importance for arriving at the facts and learning the lessons of the grave systematic and institutional abuses of the three decades of the Mubarak era'. Nevertheless, and despite these hopeful signs, perhaps insufficient thought has so far been given to the protection of minorities in the Arab world.

It is, however, worth pointing out that in England, commonly regarded as the Mother of Parliaments, democracy and respect for human rights did not arrive in one fell swoop, It arrived in stages, from the first expansion of the suffrage in 1832 to the granting of the vote to all men and women over 21, which came as late as 1928. Indeed, in local government, 'one person one vote' did not arrive until 1948, and in Northern Ireland not until 1969. Democracy, therefore, is often a slow growth. It does not arrive overnight. It is a process and not an event. In those countries where democracy has been most successful, such as Britain and Sweden, democracy has evolved slowly, in stages. In countries such as Germany, where it arrived in one fell swoop, it was less successful. But, of course, the Arab world does not have the luxury of achieving democracy in stages. It has come about almost overnight, as it were, as a result of revolution. And, as Europe knows from the experience of the French and Russian revolutions, they do not always produce democracy. The Chinese and Iranian revolutions also led not to democracy but to their opposite. The Arab world too has had its revolutions in the past, such as the revolution in Egypt in 1952 which brought Colonel Nasser to power, and the revolution in Iraq in 1958 which brought the Ba'ath party to power. Neither of these revolutions led to democracy. But, in contrast to the events of 2011, these earlier revolutions were military revolutions, led from above, not popular uprisings led from below. And the revolutions of 2011 have occurred in a world in which there is a culture of democracy, a world in which democratic government is the norm, not the exception.

It is therefore far too early to say whether the Arab spring will lead to fully functioning democracy or new forms of authoritarian government. Perhaps the best interim verdict is to suggest that the Arab world is living through a period of revolutionary turbulence and approaching what Europeans might call its 1848 moment. For 1848 was the year of failed European liberal revolutions. It was, as one historian put it, a turning-point in European history when European history failed to turn. The liberal revolutionaries had hoped to unify Germany and Italy by liberal means. Because they failed, Germany and Italy were unified by other means and by people of another sort – Bismarck and Cavour, men who could not be described as liberals; and perhaps Nazism and Fascism were long-term consequences of the failure of European liberalism in 1848. We can only hope that the Arab world proves more successful in confronting its 1848 moment than Europe was. But the period of revolutionary turbulence will not be resolved for some time – perhaps not for some years. We are living through a dangerous transitional period.

I conclude, therefore, that one can say of the Arab spring what Gandhi is alleged to have said when asked what he thought of western civilization. He replied – I think that it would be a very good idea.

This audience obviously will be particularly interested in how Israel should react to this upheaval in the Arab world. Perhaps no country in the world has been given more advice by outsiders, not always friendly outsiders, than Israel; and I am hesitant to add to their number. It has always seemed to me a form of impertinence to give advice to Israel when one is not involved in that country's day to

day problems, nor in the existential threat that Israelis face every day.

Israelis are obviously worried by the dangers of instability caused by the upheavals in the Arab world. But they do not want to be in the position of being the last defenders of corrupt and brutal Arab dictatorships. They must be on the side of liberal democracy. They, like those of us in the west, must hope that the period of turbulence ends with the establishment of stable liberal democracies. Of course, it may well be that the average Arab in the street is more hostile to Israel than Arab rulers in countries such as Egypt. Nevertheless, in the last resort, it is only the Arab people who can deliver the security that Israel so desperately succeeds; and, if a democratic Arab government achieves peace with Israel, that peace will be stable. Were liberal democracy to establish itself in the Arab world, then their governments will have a clear democratic mandate. The people will then feel that they actually 'own' the peace with Israel, rather than having it imposed upon them by a dictatorship. But an agreement with an authoritarian regime, such as Mubarak's Egypt, is always at risk when that regime changes. In democracies, agreements are maintained by governments of different political colours, even when a particular government, may, in opposition, have opposed the agreement. In a dictatorship, by contrast, an agreement is always vulnerable to a change of regime.

At the same time, clearly, Israel cannot afford to relax its vigilance – and I am sure that she will not do so. It is far too early to feel euphoria concerning the coming of liberal democracy in the Arab world.

But there is a second piece of advice that I should like to give. I said earlier that Israel was one of just two or three stable democracies in the Middle East; and, arguably, the only stable democracy in the area. Recently, Israelis felt pride in the outcome of the Katzav case, when the former President was convicted of rape in a court in which the chairman of the judges was a Christian Arab. Now, the mark of a constitutional democracy is that no one is above the law. In the United States, Richard Nixon, when accused of criminal offences, after the Watergate break-in, said that if a president does something, it cannot be illegal. The Watergate prosecutors proved him wrong and he was forced to resign the presidency in 1974 to avoid impeachment. In Britain, Lord Denning, Master of the Rolls, once reminded a minister – be you ever so high, the law is above you. Israel, therefore, has good credentials as a constitutional democracy. Many in Israel, and many friends of Israel in Britain, too, used the Katzav case to contrast Israel with the other countries of the Middle East.

But, as I pointed out at the time in an article in the *Jewish Chronicle*, Israel should not be compared with these dictatorships. The proper comparison should not be with states such as Egypt and Libya, but with long-established democracies such as Britain, the United States and the Scandinavian countries. Here, Israel's record is not so good, although, of course, neither Britain, the United States nor the Scandinavian countries face the existential threat which confronts Israel. Nevertheless, one of the most serious of the weaknesses of Israeli democracy remains its treatment of the Arab minority, which constitutes one fifth of the country. In the 1990s, the Rabin government made considerable progress in removing discrimination against Israel's Arab citizens. But this is now at risk. A recent survey conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute, of whose International Advisory Board I am a member, shows that only 51% of Israelis support equality of rights between Jews and Arabs. 78% of Jews favour excluding the Arab population from critical decision-making procedures on peace and security, while 69% favour excluding them on issues related to the economy and governance. Particularly striking was the finding that the greater the level of religious observance the less the support for equality. A recent letter, signed by a number of municipal rabbis, but condemned by President Peres and Prime Minister Netanyahu, claimed that selling or renting an apartment to a non-Jew was a desecration of the Torah. Another striking finding was that Russian immigrants were shown to be the least liberal part of the population, perhaps because they come from a highly authoritarian society. Avigdor Lieberman, currently Israel's Foreign Minister, himself an immigrant from Russia and a representative of Russian immigrants, campaigned in the 2009 elections to require a loyalty oath from Arab citizens.

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51% of Israel's population agrees with the statement that speakers should be prohibited from harshly criticizing the state of Israel in public; 58% of the Jewish population believes that university lecturers should not be permitted to publicly express political opinions, while 63% believe that the state should oversee the content of university courses. A poll carried out last November by the Israel Democracy Institute showed that 53% of Jewish citizens would prefer to see Arabs leave Israel and that the state had the right to encourage Arabs to emigrate. However, 54% said they believed that legal action should NOT be taken against citizens who speak up against the state.

An editorial in the Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz*, commenting on this survey in December 2010, was concerned that 'Cracks are emerging in Israel's democracy'. The Israel Democracy Institute survey, so it believed, 'paints a gloomy, worrisome picture whose gist is a lack of

understanding of the basic principles of Israel's political system'. It was particularly worried by the findings which reported that a majority of Israelis believed that voting rights should depend upon a declaration of loyalty to the state. Only 17% of Israelis believed that the state's self-definition as a democracy should take precedence over its self-definition as Jewish. 'These findings', *Haaretz* continued, 'follow campaigns of hatred and incitement by rabbis and politicians against Israel's Arab citizens. They also follow anti-democratic bills that have been discussed, and in some cases even passed, by the Knesset. And all this happened without the voices of the prime minister, education minister and leader of the opposition being heard. The survey results are therefore not surprising, but they are extremely disturbing. At their root lies the twisted belief that democracy means the tyranny of the majority, and that equal rights for all the state's citizens is not an integral part of the democratic system'. It is only fair to say that there are also serious human rights abuses amongst the Arab minority, especially in the treatment of women; and that amongst the Arab community, one can hear more extreme expressions of view than are heard even in Gaza.

The best contribution that Israel can make to the coming of democracy in the Middle East seems to me to improve her own democratic credentials, to show that democracy can tolerate and respect the rights of minorities, even when some members of these minorities may be hostile to the very existence of the state.

Nevertheless, Israel still has far to go before she can claim to have fulfilled the vision of her founding fathers. Indeed, in some respects the state has gone backwards in recent years. *Haaretz* urges that 'The survey must spark resolute action. The leadership of the states and all its organs, but especially the education system and the Knesset, must now mobilize to inculcate true democratic values among the public that holds such beliefs and opinions. All the relevant bodies have an obligation to take action against the ignorance and nationalism reflected in the survey. ... It must also be reiterated that a democracy cannot have two classes of citizens, first-class and second-class. And, most importantly, the next generation of Israelis must be taught these lessons. The importance of this effort cannot be overstated. What is at stake is the very nature of Israel's society and political system. Cracks in either will endanger Israel's future no less than any external threat. The kind of society reflected by this survey will not be able to preserve democracy – or even a veneer thereof'. For Israel's founding fathers, men such as Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion, Zionism was a creed calling for Jewish self-criticism, not congratulation. Israel could do with more of that self-critical spirit today. While the verdict against Katzav is to be welcomed, it led to yet another outburst of self-righteousness, an emotion which has all too often distorted Israeli life in recent years. The best contribution that Israel can make to the coming of democracy in the Middle East seems to me to improve her own democratic credentials, to show that democracy can tolerate and respect the rights of minorities, even when some members of these minorities may be hostile to the very existence of the state. Israel could then become a genuine model to those countries seeking to democratize themselves.

I return to the fundamental question which forms the title to this lecture – will the 21st century be the democratic century? If a question is easy to answer, it is not worth asking. The honest answer must be that we cannot know with any degree of certainty. It is worth remarking that hardly anyone – whether in the world of diplomacy or politics or in the academic world – predicted the Arab revolutions of 2011, just as very few depicted the demise of Communism in Europe in the 1990s. They caught the world by surprise. Nevertheless, in the light of the spread of a global culture of democracy, something absent during the inter-war wars when democracy was ideologically very much on the defensive; and in the light of the spread of global communications systems which make it difficult for governments to keep from their peoples the rights possessed by those living in advanced democracies, there are, I believe, some grounds for optimism. So I would offer a guardedly optimistic conclusion.

But there is a special reason why the answer cannot be certain. It is not just that the future remains to be written, and that no one can foretell how it will be written. It is that the future will be written not by political elites, much less by academic social scientists, but by the people themselves. In modern states, the people are not only the subjects, but also the authors of their destiny. It falls, therefore, to the people to write the next act of the drama. What this means is that the future of democracy is yet to be written, and that it is the peoples of the Arab world who will have to write it.

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