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POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL CULTURE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

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In terms of political culture and institutions, the Mediterranean basin divides naturally into two regions.

The Northern Mediterranean

The Northern Mediterranean states of southern Europe, with the exceptions of Albania and the successor states of what used to be Yugoslavia, are and have long been democracies of one kind or another. Even in Albania, moves towards a similar political system have now begun to develop, although the combined legacies of a Maoist political ideology, Islam and lingering tribal social structures will make this transition extremely difficult. Nor is the transition eased by what is occurring along Albania's borders, as Yugoslavia collapses into a welter of competing states driven by extremist nationalisms and traditional antagonisms.

Nonetheless, with these exceptions, democratic political structures, based on representative parliamentary systems, have been the rule since the end of the Second World War. They have been bolstered by a growing consensus over and integration of national economic policies as a result of Southern European membership of the European Community (EC), which involves Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Greece. They also, furthermore, have common security objectives, as expressed through their memberships of NATO, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) and the Western European Union (WEU). All-in-all, the Northern Mediterranean coastline forms an homogeneous block of states integrated by common security structures and a generalised political culture.

Of course, national and regional differences do exist and can have political significance. The same is true of the informal political culture that pervades the region and which, in many respects, has far more in common with countries elsewehere in the Mediterranean than with the Northern European democracies which are their partners in the EC, NATO, the CSCE and the WEU. In general, however - and with the exception of the Balkans - the political similarities between them far outweigh the differences and, for the past half-century, have guaranteed political stability.

The Southern Mediterranean Rim

Superficially, similar assumptions appear to apply to the states of the Southern Mediterranean rim. After all, apart from Israel, the dominant culture in all the states concerned is Islamic, even when the states concerned are not explicitly Islamic states. There is clearly a common political culture, too, which reflects this wider cultural heritage. There are even integrative formal institutions, similar to the EC that should contribute towards some kind of regional political stability. These traditionally include the Arab League and its associated institutions, or the Islamic Conference Organisation. There are also the new sub-regional structures of the Black Sea Council and the Economic Cooperation Organisation in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Union Arabe du Maghreb (UMA) in the Western Mediterranean. More recent initiatives deal with regional security, such as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM) or other structures now being explored in the "Five-plus-Five" talks between France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Malta on the one hand and the five UMA states of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania on the other.

The reality, however, is quite different. In fact, the Southern Mediterranean rim is characterised by political instability at the state level and by a high potential for inter-state conflict at the regional level. Although the Arab-Israeli dispute has conventionally been held responsible for this situation, at least as far as the states of the Mashriq are concerned, this is by no means a complete explanation and has much less relevence in the context of the Maghrib. In addition to regional and intra-state stresses caused by the Arab-Israeli dispute, particularly in the front-line states of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt, there are other structural factors that have also contributed to political instability and, in many instances, have been far more significant.

The issue of Israel

Indeed, it is, perhaps, only in Lebanon and Jordan that, since 1970, the dispute with Israel has been the dominant factor in creating political instability. Furthermore, it is only in Israel that the dispute itself threatens the essential democratic nature of the political process. This threat is centred around three separate but interlinked issues. The first is

the ambiguous political and legal status of Israeli citizens as a result of their confessional attributes as Christians and Muslims. The second is the confused legal status applicable in the Occupied Territories - which are "territories in dispute" according to Israel and "territories in occupation" under most accepted interpretations of international law. The third is the social and political consequences of the intifada on Israel itself.

(1) The causes of the problem

Israel is, in theory, a nation-state in which membership is predicated on an assumption of access to a common religious culture and in which the claim to the territory occupied by the state is also justified by recourse to that culture. Although other religious minorities exist inside israel and have freedom of belief, their members are not Israeli citizens - except for Muslim and Christian Israeli Arabs who formed 18.5 per cent of the Israeli population in 1990[1]. Their ambiguous status arises from the fact that they represent the residue of the original Palestinian population which did not flee in 1947-48 and were therefore granted Israeli citizenship, even though they were not Jewish. Although in theory they have equal rights under the constitution, this is, in reality, far from the case because of discrimination over military service, land ownership, municipal provision and educational access[2].

In the Occupied Territories, the legal system in force is, in theory, Jordanian law. It is applied by the Israeli military administration. However, it is interpreted and supplemented by additional regulations issued by the military administration which are administrative in origin but have the force of law. Furthermore, this system only applies to the Palestinian populations of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The 160,000-strong Israeli settler population is administered under Israeli law in force in Israel as defined by its pre-1967 "Green Line" boundaries[3]. In addition, East Jerusalem and the Gholan Heights are also subject to Israeli law since they have been

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[1]   Central Bureau of Statistics (1990), **Statistical Abstracts**.

[2]   See Kretzmer D. (1990), **The legal status of the Arabs in Israel**, Westview Press (Boulder).

[3]   For an analysis of this situation, see Shedaheh R. (1992), **The Sealed Room**, Quartet.

annexed to Israel, even though the majority of their populations, or a substantial minority of them are not citizens of Israel. In reality, of course, military rule ensures order, whatever the legal system in force may formally require.

This contradiction culminates in the social and political consequences of the intifada, in which the implicit socio-political duality of Israeli society, with all its implications for social, cultural and ideological discrimination, is openly expressed. Quite apart from whether the intifada has been successful at enforcing and articulating Palestinian demands, it is clear that it has forced Israeli society into confronting the implications of its de facto annexation of the Occupied Territories in 1967. Indeed, it has profoundly polarised Israeli society, as well as the political parties. It has reinforced a significant constituency, typified by the Peace Now movement and the Meretz political party, which has questioned the assumptions behind Israeli policy towards the Occupation ever since the catastrophic intervention in Lebanon in "Operation Peace for Galilee" in 1982.[4] At the same time, it has strengthened an alternative and, perhaps, dominant constituency which would argue for the exclusion of Palestinians from Israel proper, whether within its pre-1967 boundaries or within its post-1967 frontiers. Such groups, of which the Moledet party is perhaps the best example, argue for the transfer of Palestinians (and presumeably, by extension, of Israeli Arabs as well) out of Israel – which, in their terms is Eretz Israel and includes the Occupied Territories.

Although it has been argued that this profound disenchantment with the consequences of occupation is, in itself, a significant factor for change, it is equally arguable that the experience of the intifada has been a means of reinforcing the tendencies towards exclusion of the Arab minority and exclusiveness in access to citizenship that have been latent in the Israeli state ever since its inception. In effect, all three issues combine to reinforce the implicit – indeed, often openly explicit – hierarchical political divisions within the state, with all the concomitant implications for authoritarian discrimination. These divisions, in turn, undermine the democratic structure of government, so that, "... a democracy may well

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[4]   Rigby A. (1991), Living the intifada, Zed Press; 70-77; 167-189.

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wield totalitarian powers..." because it regards
"...current majority opinion as the only criterion of
the legitimacy of the powers of government."[5] They do
so because they undermine the crucial aspect of a
stable democratic system which ensures that it is
equitable and thus acceptable to the totality of the
population to which it is applied - the rule of law.

In short, quite apart from any wider issue of the
justification and legitimisation of the State of
Israel, the arbitrary nature of its legal system
insofar as it applies to Israel's minority populations
(whether formal citizens or not) increasingly damages
the legitimacy of its governmental system and thereby
undermines its democratic nature. Ironically enough,
it is in this respect that Israel, normally held up as
an example of genuine democratic government in a
region of repression and totalitarianism, reveals
features of a common political experience with the
states that surround it. It differs from most of them
in that this crisis of legitimacy is an inherent
consequence of Israel's creation within the Arab
Middle East, the event which was the sole and original
cause of the Arab-Israeli dispute. The crises of
legitimacy in Jordan and Lebanon have also been, in
large part, the consequence of this dispute.

(2)   The effects of the peace process
It could be argued that the current peace process in
the Middle East will address this problem of
governmental legitimacy. Unfortunately, this is not
necessarily the case, for the fundamental issue, that
of resolving the Palestinian problem in an equitable
fashion, may not be appropriately addressed. The
reason for this is that equity in this context means
resolving the inherent contradictions caused by
social, political and legal discrimination within the
Israeli state structure, otherwise the crisis over
Israel's democratic legitimacy will continue. The
current proposals for delegated interim self-
government, together with Israel's adament refusal to
consider the eventual creation of a Palestinian state,
simply obfuscate the issue, even if they eventually
make it possible for the Arab-Israeli dispute to be
resolved.

There is also an inherent legal contradiction in
the peace process itself as far as self-government and

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[5]   Hayek F.A. (1978), New studies in philosophy, politics,
economics and the history of ideas, Routledge, Kegan-Paul
(London); 142.

autonomy are concerned. Israel has no recognised title to the Occupied Territories and its annexation of the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem is not accepted in the international arena. Thus, since Israel cannot claim sovereignty over the region, nor does it claim to be in occupation of them, nor, indeed, does it hold them in trusteeship under a United Nations mandate, it cannot have any right to dispose of the territories in question, nor to determine the form of government which should apply. The only body which could adjudicate on this matter' would be the United Nations itself, or one of its associated bodies, such as the International Court of Justice. The only forms that a solution could take would be the grant of a mandated trusteeship by the United Nations or the application of the principle of self-determination, as provided for in UNGA Resolution 1514 (XV) of December 1960.

Apart from this approach, the only other conceivable solution would be to establish who actually did have sovereignty over the Occupied Territories before 1967. In the case of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, this would be Jordan, although Jordanian title is also open to question. In the case of the Golan Heights, Syria is unquestionably the sovereign power. In Gaza, however, the situation is not so simple, for Egypt merely administered the Strip and did not claim sovereignty. In that case, the problem must also return to the United Nations, for it had responsibility for the original mandate. Indeed, even under the terms of UNGA Resolution 181 (II) of November 29, 1947 which proposed the division of Palestine and legitimised in international eyes the founding of the State of Israel, Israel has no rights of sovereignty over the Occupied Territories, for they were to form part of a Palestinian state - something which both Israel and the United States of America (whether under the outgoing Bush administration or the incoming Clinton administration) refuse to contemplate. In all cases, however, there seems to be no legal justification for Israel's assumption of its right to impose its own autonomy solution on the current peace process, nor for that solution to be endorsed by the United States.

Even if the peace process is permitted to continue, however, despite these inherent contradictions, no viable solution can be found if the only outcome is a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict at the price of an illusory deal over Palestinian autonomy. The core problem continues to be that of an equitable and permanent solution for

legitimate Palestinian aspirations towards nationhood. Ideally, Israel's Arab minority issue must be resolved by the grant of genuine legal equality within Israel's pre-1967 borders, whilst the continued occupation and settlement of the West Bank, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem must be ended by Israeli withdrawal. If this does not occur, the contradictions that have threatened the continued viability of Israel's democratic governmental system will continue to undermine it - and, despite governmental attitudes in the Arab world, popular rejectionism will ensure continued regional instability, quite apart from widespread disenchantment with the governmental systems that currently exist there.

Governmental legitimacy in the Arab world

The simple fact is that, at present, few Arab governments, if any, can legitimately claim popular support. The reasons for this reflect a complex interplay of several distinct factors which also throw doubt on the likely success of the current pressures for regional democratisation:-

(1)   There is, first of all, a profound conflict between between the conventional assumptions that Middle Eastern states are nation-states and the universalist ideologies which tend to inform the general regional political culture.

(2)   There is a further conflict between the different universalist ideologies themselves.

(3)   Beyond that, the fact that few states in the region are genuine nation-states, given their minority problems, renders the basic political assumptions behind the concept of the nation-state in the Middle East largely irrelevent.

(4)   Indeed, the actual nature of the control of government, often by groups or elites which do not reflect the cultural and political objectives of the populations over which they rule, means that most states on the Arab littoral of the Mediterranean are inherently "defective"[6].

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[6]   In the sense that the isolation of the ruling elite destroys the normative assumption of popular legitimisation through nationalist consensus. See Heiberg M. (1975), "Insiders/outsiders: Basque nationalism", **Arch. europ.**

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(5) This is exacerbated by the economic problems that most of these states face and by the growing threat to their survival proffered by political Islam.

(6) The disastrous effects on state stability of this complex set of factors is then aggravated by external problems, of which the Arab-Israeli dispute is by far the most serious. There are, however, others in the post-Cold War era, not least the growing tensions for certain states in their relations with Europe and the USA, which also worsens domestic and inter-state tensions throughout the region.

(1) The ideological issues

The typical state paradygm today is the nation-state, in which the structure of the state, however defined, is legitimised by the fact that it is inhabited by a nation, an egalitarian community sharing a common but unique culture which is thereby separated from all other similar communities by an ethnic boundary.

> In brief, nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones, and, in particular, that ethnic boundaries within a given state - a contingency already formally excluded by the principle in its general formulation - should not separate power-holders from the rest.[7]

In the Arab Middle East, where the universal cultural paradygm is primarily linguistic and secondarily religious in nature, the actual states that exist correspond to entities which are smaller than the unique community which comprises the nation, whether on linguistic or religious grounds. Indeed, both these cultural concepts are universalist in nature Thus, ab initio, it is very difficult to anticipate a coincidence between state and nation which would create a legitimised political structure of the kind dominant in international affairs today.

Of course, concepts of communal loyalty or identity are conditional and the primordial linguistic or religious units are not the only contexts in which

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sociol., VI (1975); 186-193.

[7]   Gellner E. (1983), **Nations and nationalism**, Blackwells (Oxford); 1.

individuals locate themselves politically. Nor are these concepts permanent, for individual concepts of loyalty and identity evolve. In any case, states also seek to force appropriate patterns of loyalty and identity into existence, in order to legitimise themselves through the process of nation-building[8]. This has been typically the case in Egypt, where early Egyptian territorial nationalism of the first half of the twentieth century was characterised by its "pharaonic" quality in which Egyptians were seen as heirs to a five thousand year history, rather than to a fourteen hundred-year old Arabo-Islamic tradition. More recently, other states, such as Turkey, Iran and Algeria, have attempted similar ventures, with varying success.

Nonetheless, Arabism or Islam have ultimately and generally proved to be more enduring points of reference for collective identity than has the concept of a particularistic nationalism that runs counter to regional historical experience. Over time, no doubt, the concept of territorial nations, coincident with the states which currently exist in the Middle East, will come to dominate as the region modernises and evolves[9], but that outcome is still relatively distant. It currently only has a relevence in those areas where there are substantial minorities which are recognisably different in either linguistic or religious terms from the majority communities amongst whom they live or where specific political experiences have created nationalist awareness, as in Iran, Turkey or Algeria.

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[8]   The term originates in the nineteenth century with Walter Bageshot, who saw this process, which he also called "nation-making", as the essential activity for states to engage in.   See Hobsbawm E.J. (1991), **Nations and nationalism since 1780: programmes, myth, reality,** Cambridge University Press (Cambridge); 23, 25.

[9]   The development of nationalism and the nation-state are inherently modernising processes in which traditional "organic societies" are forced by economic and social change into evolving into "mechanical societies" in which new dimensions of identity and collective loyalty have to be established which are co-terminus with the new political and territorial structures created by modernisation.   See Hobsbawm, op. cit.; 9-13.

Territorial and cultural nationalism[10] has become the dominant form of identity in suppressed minorities such as the Berbers of North Africa or the Kurds of Iraq and Turkey. Where repression has not been so severe, as in Syria and Iran, separatist nationalism has also been subdued, although nationalist awareness amongst the Kurds there is just as acute. Territorial nationalism has also characterised the two communities at the heart of the Arab-Israeli dispute, with Zionism stimulating Palestinian nationalism over the past forty years. States have tended to respond to it with repression, in order to force minorities into a common cultural mould in order to promote the eventual creation of an homogeneous nation, or with the intention of excluding or eliminating the minorities concerned. However, since alternative forms of identity exist within the Middle Eastern and North African cultural environment, repression becomes an ineffective way of trying to ensure the legitimacy of the state or of its governing institutions.

One of these forms is superficially akin to the nationalism associated with the nation-state – Arab nationalism. Over the past twenty-five years, however, both its forms – Nasirism and Ba'athism – have been progressively discredited as ideologies for political action, particularly as a result of the Arab defeat in 1967. Furthermore, the repressive natures of states such as Syria and Iraq, in which Ba'athism in one or other of its two variants is the dominant ideology, has further discredited Arab nationalism as a political dogma. Instead, it has become a cultural referant, in which access to a common language and culture provides a general sense of identity throughout the region, even if specific political loyalties now emphasise regional and even national identities. In some parts of the Arab world, however, even that sense of identity is now waning, largely as a result of the recent war against Iraq.

Nevertheless, there is still an evident desire, even a need, for a more universalist political ideology than the form of nationalism associated with the nation-state. Such an ideology, moreover, has to have an authenticity within the regional culture for it to be acceptable and this is one of the reasons why political Islam has become in recent years such a dominant issue. There are many other reasons, of

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[10]   A discussion of nationalist typologies and of theories of nationalism is given in Smith A. (1973), **Theories of nationalism**, Duckworth (London).

course, for its success, such as resentment at economic deprivation, particularly amongst the new (and often transitional[11]) elites and class groups created through modernisation and development and a reaction to perceived Western interference, as well as the continuing Arab-Israeli dispute. However, the failure of alternative ideologies to effectively legitimise the state in the region is, perhaps, the most important reason for its success.

The political Islamic vision is complex and, in the Mediterranean at least, has little connection with the Iranian experience in the Islamic republic created by Ayatolleh Khomeini in 1979-1989. It is true that Iran has had a profound influence on the development of Hizbullah in Lebanon, but the mainstream and extremist Islamicist movements elsewhere really derive from the Salafiyyist movement created by Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani in the 1860s and from the founding of the Ikhwan Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood) in Ismailiya in 1922 by Hassan al-Banna. The most immediate intellectual influences on the current movements have been the Pakistani philosopher, Ala al-Mawdudi, and the Egyptian Islamicist leader, Sayyid Qutb, who was executed in Egypt during the Nasirist period[12]. All of these influences have been Sunni in inspiration and, apart from the Iranian tradition exemplified by Ayatolleh Khomeini and his concept of the Veleyat-e Faqih (government by jurisconsult), the only other significant Shi'a influence on Islamicist movements in the Mediterranean has been the polemicist and philosopher, Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr, in Iraq who was executed by the Saddam Hussain regime in 1980[13].

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[11]   The term "transitional" here is used to describe the process whereby individuals and groups being forced by development to transfer from traditional class patterns and social strata to new ones brought into existence by the development process itself, although definitions of collective identity still have to coalesce. See Stirling P. (1972), Turkish village, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge).

[12]   See Ayubi N. (1991), Political Islam: religion and politics in the Arab world, Routledge (London); 120-157, and Choueiri Y.M. (1990), Islamic fundamentalism, Pinter (London).

[13]   Joffe G. (1990), "Developments in Iraq since the ceasefire", in Davies C. (1990), After the war: Iraq, Iran and the Arab Gulf, Carden (Chichester); 244.
        Mallat C. (1988), "Iraq", in Hunter S.T. (1988), The

The Islamicist agenda is also complex. Although it is relatively easy to establish what Islamicists oppose and to determine the basic elements of their proposed political alternatives, the details of what is involved is far more complex. All Islamicists reject existing state structures in the Arab world as secular corruptions of the Islamic ideal and call for the restoration of the shari°a (Islamic religious law) as the appropriate guide to social organisation. Some extremists, such as **Takfir wa Hijra** in Egypt, are prepared to use violence to achieve this end. Many also look towards the constitutional structures of the early Islamic period as the paradygm for the modern world. Others, particularly in Egypt and in North Africa, attempt to define a new interpretation of Islamic tradition as a model for the modern world and are also prepared to accept a degree of political plurality within any alternative Islamic state construct. All, however, consider that the underlying principle must be one of an implicit social contract between government and population to ensure the proper social observance of Islamic doctrine, the underlying purpose which defines the structure of government. This is articulated through the process of **shura** (consultation) which, together with the application of shar°a law, provides legitimacy to government.

In reality, however, Islamicists have few detailed and practical prescriptions for government. After all, only the Islamic republic of Iran has actually had to grapple with the problems of government, although both Pakistan and Sudan have developed political systems which demonstrate sone elements of the theoretical Islamic state. Elsewhere, political Islam is confined to opposition to existing state and governmental structures and has not yet developed a significant theoretical corpus that would allow us to fully define an Islamic state. The only area in which more practical developments have taken place has been in Islamic economics. This is based on a moral objection to the principle of the evaluation of the time-value of money through interest, together with a rejection of the financial quantification of risk in the insurance sector. In place of interest various devices have been suggested, including commission arrangements, whilst little attention has so far been devoted to insurance problems because this touches on divine prerogative. Furthermore, many of the experiments with Islamic banking, particularly in

politics of Islamic revivalism: diversity and unity, University of Indiana Press (Indiana); 71-88.

Egypt, have proved to be very dubious. As far as the development of instruments to match the sophistication of Western financial markets is concerned, much work remains to be done before Islamicist theorists can claim to offer an genuinely alternative system.

All-in-all, therefore, the problem of collective identity in the Mediterranean Arab world continues to be confused. Although the nation-state ideal has proved to be unsatisfactory, its competitors, whether through Arab nationalism or through political Islam, offer little in the way of viable alternatives. Political Islam, in any case, acts substantially as a vehicle of protest, rather than as a genuine alternative structure. In the end, no doubt, the nation-state ideal will dominate, but, before it does, there will be considerable delay asnd experiment with alternative structures, not least because the ideal itself seems fatally flawed in Arab eyes.

(2)   The make-up of the state
The main problem with the nation-state ideal - apart from the ideological confrontation and the problem of minority aspirations - resides in the fact that, in reality, nation-states simply do not exist in the Middle East and North Africa! There is neither the feature of a common and unique culture coincident with the territorial limits of the state, nor is there the tacit acceptance by populations of their ruling elites. Furthermore, the history of the evolution of the Middle Eastern state - as a successor state to a colonial entity or as a state that evolved under the influence of regional crises over the Arab-Israeli dispute or over universalist political ideologies - has tended to privilege state and government control by specific elite groups.

These groups often achieved power as a result of their control of national armed forces, which have tended to be major factors in the development of governmental institutions and state ideology, as elsewhere in the developing world. In the Middle Eastern context, however, the justification for the use of the armed forces to seize power was usually the failure of a previous regime to grapple successfully with regional issues; namely, the conflict with Israel or the supposedly popular demand for Arab unity - and latterly, of course, of the need to regain authentic legitimacy through Islam, as is the case in Sudan. Both issues were therefore seen as legitimising issues for government, in the absence of legitimisation through the process of the nationalist construction of

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the state.

It was rare, however, that the rhetoric used by
ruling elites corresponded with their actual
behaviour, once in power, or with their policies, as
perceived by the population at large. Policy tended
to be devoted to the maintenance of elite control,
even in the sphere of foreign affairs. Only in those
states directly threatened by Israel, such as Syria or
Jordan, did the rhetoric of Arab confrontation with
Israel have any substance. In domestic terms,
ideological issues were perverted into a doctrinal
justification of repression, while the reality of
political construction reflected the kinship and
ethnic structure of the ruling elite[14]. The result
has been that the state and government has become the
private property of the ruling elite and that there
has been a concomitant estrangement from the
population at large. The institutions of the state
itself are no longer seen to be disinterested, in that
all may have equal access to them. Instead, access is
seen as part of a process of patronage, in which the
ruling elite becomes the privileged catalyst.
Furthermore, the elite acquires hegemonic control of
the national economy which it exploits for its own
benefit.

In these circumstances it is not surprising that
both the government and even the state itself should
be seen by the population over which they rule to be
illegitimate and that other models for state control
should be sought. Equally, it is not surprising if
such elites seek to enforce control, firstly by
controlling political discourse through ideological
rhetoric and repression and, secondly, by trying to
appropriate some other means of legitimisation. Thus
monarchical systems (the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia,
Jordan and Morocco) seek a religious and historical
legitimisation whilst republican systems call upon
ideology (Ba'athism in Syria and Iraq, Nasirist Arab
nationalism in Libya and formerly in Sudan and Egypt)
or, in the case of the few states seeking nation-
statehood (Turkey, Iran, Algeria and Egypt since the
death of Jamal Abd al-Nasir) by reference to history
or to revolution.

In reality, many of these elites actually
maintain control of government and the state by a

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[14]   See Owen R. (1992), State, power and politics in the
making of the modern Middle East, Routledge (London),
particularly chapters 2 to 5.

series of informal structures that actually penetrate
into the administration and that guarantee political
cohesion through family, tribal or regional identity.
It is this factor of informal organisation and net-
working that ensures that the state apparatus becomes
effectively the private property of the elite and is
seen as such by the population-at-large. It is this
factor which, in short, renders the Middle Eastern and
North African state "defective". It is also the
factor that makes evolutionary change towards a
democratic system extremely difficult, if not
impossible.

(3)   The economic dimension
These intrinsic defects in the legitimisation process
of the state are intensified by economic factors. The
Mediterranean states of the Middle East have not
generally been amongst the most advantaged in terms of
economic resources: although Syria, Egypt, Libya,
Tunisia and Algeria are all oil producers, only Libya
and Algeria have been able to rely on oil revenues to
finance development. In terms of other resources and
raw materials, the picture tends to be bleak: Morocco,
it is true, is a major phosphates producer - indeed,
the world's largest exporter and third largest
producer - while Jordan, Syria, Tunisia and Algeria
also produce modest amounts of phosphate. Otherwsie
there is very little. Even in domestic terms,
resources for agriculture - arable land and water -
are generally poor, with only Turkey and, potentially
Sudan, able to maintain a constant surplus of
production over domestic demand.

Yet all Mediterranean Arab states have suffered
from demographic explosion since independence, with
population growth rates today ranging between 2.2 and
over 3 per cent per annum. The population of North
Africa alone - set today at around 67 million will
double by the year 2025, whilst the population of the
Mediterranean basin as a whole will grow from around
325 million today to around 550 million with virtually
all the growth confined to the Southern Mediterranean
rim[15]. This places a tremendous strain on the
resources of Middle Eastern and North African
economies which is worsened by the fact that all the
states in the region suffer from massive urban drift.
Thus, economic growth must not only address the basic

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[15]   See Chapman G.P. and Baker K.M. (eds)(1992), The
changing geography of Africa and the Middle East, Routledge
(London); 141, 191.

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issue of under-development, it must also be sufficient to outpace population growth and must also adapt to the altering population morphology of the region. The reality is that, apart from Libya, these objectives are hardly realised or are not realised at all by the economies of the southern Mediterranean rim.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that, in the face of this economic failure - which is exacerbated by maladministration and the political problems inherent in the nature of the control of the state - there is a growing public disaffection with government. Indeed, even if government were generally considered legitimate in political terms throughout the region, there is little doubt that the growing regional economic crisis alone would provide sufficient grounds for popular rejection of government.

This crisis of confidence has also been worsened by external economic factors. Middle Eastern states, which depend on Europe as their major trading partner, have seen their terms of trade worsen in recent years and will undoubtedly see further declines as a result of the institution of the Single European Market in 1993 and the end of the transitional integration process for Spain and Portugal in 1996. Even measures which supposedly would ease the economic crisis for the developing world, as, for instance, the current Uraguay Round of GATT negotiations, can often have disastrous micro-economic consequences. The maintenance of low international cereal prices, for instance, will render peasant sedentary agriculture in the Middle East and North Africa (which relies on cerealm production) unviable because world cereal prices are artificially low as the result of hidden subsidy in the USA and elswhere in the developed world.

Even these problems, however, pale into relative insignificance when compared with the problems created by foreign debt. The Arab states of the Mediterranean rim have a combined foreign debt of around $100 bn, of which Egypt ($35 bn), Algeria ($23 bn) and Morocco ($21bn) bear the brunt of the burden[16]. Repayment of this debt places a very heavy burden on foreign exchanges resources which would otherwise be devoted to economic development. Once again, these added

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[16]   Detailed figures are available in World Bank (1992), World Development Report 1992, Oxford University Press (Oxford); 260-261.

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economic burdens can only fuel popular rejection of existing governmental structures. Indeed, in Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, they have led to repeated and serious nationwide riots over the past decade.

(4)   The international environment
These problems are worsened by the attitudes adopted towards the Southern Mediterranean rim states by the world's major trading blocs and creditor countries in Europe and the USA. These are of three types: demands for economic restructuring as the price for debt rescheduling; demands for political change in return for official aid flows; and threats of political, diplomatic and even military pressure in response to foreign policy options of which the developed world disapproves. The issue here is not whether such policy initiatives by developed world states are justified or not but what the effect of them might be on government legitimacy in the countries of the Southern Mediterranean rim.

(a)   Economic restructuring
Debt rescheduling agreements are drawn up with the Paris Club of official creditors and with the London Committee of commercial creditors for North African states. In both cases, such agreements are usually contingent on prior agreement with the IMF over a standby credit arrangement from the Fund to aid resolution of the immediate debt repayment crisis. Such standby credit, however, is itself dependent on the country in question establishing an accepted programme of economic restructuring with the Fund, better known as a "stabilisation programme".

Such programmes are based on the principle that accumulation of debt and failures in debt repayment arise from inappropriate resource allocation within the economy as a result of unrealistic domestic pricing policies and excessive state intervention in the economy[17]. They therefore require a reduction in state intervention - through subsidy removal and privatisation of state sector assets - trade liberalisation through removal of import controls and domestic protectionist measures, reductions in budget deficits and currency liberalisation.

These IMF programmes are often accompanied by World Bank aid, in the form of structural loans.

[17]   Todaro M.P. (1989), **Economic development in the Third World**, Longman (London); 83.

These are designed to ease the transition process involved in meeting the targets set by the IMF. However, the removal of subsidies, particularly on consumer goods and food, together with the longer-term changes in economic structures that can cause unemployment, means that such programmes cause considerable popular resentment. There are also growing doubts as to whether the objectives set by such programmes are best achieved by the methods currently approved by both the IMF and the World Bank[18]. Whatever the real situation, popular resentment against restructuring measures is also directed at government, since it is the government of the country concerned that has to initiate the reform programme demanded by the IMF, whatever the political consequences.

(b) "Openness" and "conditionality"

Economic restructuring is now accompanied by two other requirements which can also have a deleterious effect on the domestic relationship between governemnt and population. The first of these - "openness" - reflects the demand by donor states and international organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank that developing countries should encourage direct private foreign investment, rather than relying on official development assistance for the financing of national development. This is all very well but it suffers from several disadvantages:-

(i)   Firstly, the proportion of direct private foreign aid flowing to developing countries has been falling in relative and absolute terms for the past decade, whilst the developed world of the "Triad" - the USA, the EC and Japan - has seen its proportion rise towards 80 per cent of the total, simply because of the absence of political risk and the certainty of adequate rates of return upon investment.

(ii)   Secondly, multi-national corporations, which are the major sources of such investment, seek stable political environments for investment and, even when they are prepared to take risk, require adequate infrastructural developments to maximise financial returns. Most developing countries in the Southern Mediterranean rim lack both

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[18]   See, for example, Horton B. (1990), **Morocco: analysis and reform of economic policy**, World Bank (Washington), as well as more recnt publications by the OECD on economic restructuring policy.

requirements.

(iii)   Thirdly, popular attitudes towards multi-
national corporations still reflect the very bad
reputation such bodies acquired during the 1960s
and 1970s - so that governments that encourage
multi-national investment are blamed for the
consequent loss of economic sovereignty by their
populations.

(iv)   Finally, there is no certainty that such
investment need actually generate development
finance, for there are usually very generous
financial terms provided to encourage investment
that mean that profits are repatriated rather
than being re-invested in the country
concerned[19].

The problems associated with "openness" are
exacerbated by "conditionality" which is the principle
that official developemnt assistance is only made
available provided the recipient countries attain
certain standards of human rights observence and of
the democratisation of the domestic political process.
In themselves, such objectives are highly appropriate,
but their blanket application can destabilise
government and thereby undermine the very political
stability that private foreign investors seek if they
are to invest.   Furthermore, such political
instability is by no means guaranteed to generate
genuinely democratic political change, nor need it
stimulate the effective rule of law in countries in
which the legal process itself has been an adjunct of
the application of arbitrary power.   The result is
that either the states concerned are further estranged
from the developed world or their systems undergo
transformations that in themselves militate against
the democratic reforms that are intended to be
encouraged by the demands placed upon such countries
by donor states.   This problem is likely to be
exacerbated in the future, given the growing tendency
in the developed world to "tie" aid in this way and
the growing popular resentment in the Arab world, at
least, at what is often perceived to be direct
interference in the political process.

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[19]   These issues are discussed at length in Joffé E.G.H.
(1992), "Economic liberalisation and foreign investment",
Japanese Review of Middle Eastern Economies, 17 (Summer
1992).

(c) Political interference

One of the consequences of the end of the Cold war has been a growing assurance in the developed world that certain norms of international behaviour can be imposed on countries in the developing world, either by direct intervention or through the United Nations. In itself, this assumption is unremarkable - even though it runs completely counter to the universally accepted principle of the sanctity of state sovereignty in international relations. Furthermore, it is simply an extension of the principle of "conditionality" mentioned above.

The problem is, however, that populations in the developing world rarely see such interventions as disinterested or based on abstract moral principle. In their eyes, whatever the provocation might have been, the real reason for the intervention was to satisfy some notaional or regional interest within the developed world itself. Thus, although the illegality of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was widely accepted in the Middle East and even in North Africa, the US-led and UN-authorised Multinational Coalition intervention was equally widely condemned as a cynical device to, amongst other things, provide for direct Western control of Middle Eastern oil supplies. Popular condemnation of the intervention was also turned against those governments in the Middle East that participated in the Coalition, with the result that disaffection with government in countries such as Syria, Egypt and Morocco was intensified, whilst even governments such as those of Jordan, Yemen and Tunisia, which openly condemned the Western approach to the problem, were attacked for supine compliance in the West's "hidden agenda".

(5) The democratic dilemma

All these problems which threaten the construction and maintenance of viable state systems in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly along the southern Mediterranean rim, also militate against successful democratisation inside regional states. It should be borne in mind, however, that, as the experiences of Jordan, Morocco and Egypt make clear, advances in this direction can still occur, provided the basic structure of the state is sufficiently stable and is perceived so to be, in order to withstand the strains that democratisation engenders. This, in turn, reflects the existence of state systems that have sufficient longevity or adequate alternative means of legitimisation to have acquired a significant degree of internal stability.

However, even here, there is the additional problem that democratisation cannot succeed unless there is a general consensus within a particular state-community over the process and objectives of the system of government which is to be put into operation. In other words, there must first be an agreed framework for voicing dissent and an assumption that no field of disagreement can be so severe as to call the governmental system itself into question. Secondly, there must also be a consensus over the socio-political balance to be achieved between individual liberty and collective equality which is to be guaranteed by the governmental system[20]. Behind these two considerations lies a further assumption; that the system of government itself cannot exercise arbitrary power, even when it monopolises the legitimate use of violence[21], for there must be an independent legal system that can sanction government action through the accepted principle of the rule of law[22]. The state, in other words, must be, "...the

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[20] Hayek, op. cit.; 142-143: Roper J. (1989), **Democracy and its critics: Anglo-American democratic thought in the nineteenth century**, Unwin-Hyman (London); 204-208.

[21] This is Weber's definition of the state: Scruton R. (ed)(1982), **Dictionary of political thought**, Yale University Press (New Haven, Connecticut); 446-447.

[22] Interestingly enough, Kant argued that democracy failed on precisely this count:-

> ...democracy, in the truest sense of the word, is necessarily a despotism, because it establishes an executive power through which all citizens may make decisions about (and indeed against) the single individual without his consent, so that decisions are made by all the people and yet not by all the people; and this means that the general will is in contradiction with itself, and thus also with freedom. (Kant, "Perpetual peace" in Reiss H. (ed)(1991), **Kant: political writings**, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge); 101)

His views have been echoed by Hayek in his comparison of liberalism with democracy:-

> Liberalism is concerned with the functions of government and particularly with the limitation of all its powers. Democracy is concerned with the question of who is to direct government. Liberalism requires that all power, and therefore also that of the

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actuality of the ethical idea."[23] Finally, there must be an agreed system for the peaceful transfer of power from one ruling elite to another in response to popular decision as expressed through an agreed and generally accepted constitutional system. These conditions rarely apply in their totality in the Middle East at present, nor can it said that they are likely to in the near future.

The outlook

Nonetheless, the outlook is not completely bleak. Several Mediterranean littoral states have begun to develop political systems that respond to popular pressure and where a separation of executive, legislative and legal power has begun to develop. Turkey, for example, despite its intensely antagonistic attitude towards Kurdish nationalism, has now been able to develop a parliamentary system. Admittedly, the Turkish armed forces still remain the ultimate guarantor of the Kemelist political inheritance as they made clear in 1980, but they have, nonetheless, been prepared to vacate the forefront of the political scene to allow multi-party politics to replace them.

In Jordan, the king's decision, in response to the riots against IMF-sponsored economic reforms in 1989, to re-introduce a democratic system has proved immensely popular. Furthermore, although Jordan was thereby forced to take a stance opposed to the war against Iraq in 1990-1991, the system has proved to be strong enough to resist the consequent economic pressures and even to withstand the recent trials of Islamicist politicians accused of plotting to overthrow the state. There is no doubt that King Hussain has been able to capitalise on the situation by recourse to the traditional Hashemite ideology of Arab unity under the successors to the Sharifs of Macca. Nonetheless, there is a clear change in the

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majority, be limited. Democracy came to regard current majority opinion as the only criterion of the legitimacy of the powers of government...Liberalism is thus incompatible with unlimited democracy, just as it is incompatible with all other forms of unlimited government. (Hayek, op. cit.; 142-143)

[23] Hegel F. (edited by Wood A.W. - 1991), **Elements of the philosophy of Right,** Cambridge University Press (Cambridge); 275.

political atmosphere. The problem is that the unresolved Palestinian issue and the on-going difficulties in dealing with Israel could well undermine the delicate experiment unless real concessions are made in the peace process - and there is little sign of that occurring in the near future, if at all.

In Egypt, the picture is far less re-assuring, for the domestic incompetence of the Mubarak regime undermines its limited democratic credentials. These are due to be further undermined by the requirements laid upon Cairo for economic restructuring by the IMF, whilst Egyptians themselves are intensely disappointed by their country's inability to assert its leadership role inside the Arab world after the war against Iraq. There is a further danger as well; that of a growth of political Islam. The Mubarak government has tried to neutralise the complex and multifaceted Islamicist movement in Egypt by taking over part of its agenda. It has, however, been outflanked, both by the movement itself which has been able to expand rapidly and to penetrate into the administration and civil society, and by the conservative religious establishment around Al-Azhar which competes for the same social ground as the Islamicist movement. The result is that a confrontation between government and the Islamicist movement now seems inevitable, in which the governemnt will, no doubt, impose its will, but at the cost of losing popular legitimacy.

The only other country in which formal democratic institutions seem to have take root is Morocco. A limited democratic system, involving a plurality of political parties, has been operating there since 1972 and parliamentary power was recently increased by constitutional change. At the same time, King Hassan retains control of the essential levers of power with the result that the legal system has to serve the objectives of the government. In addition, power is diffused through the political system by a series of parallel power structures that reflect the traditional Moroccan political culture of balancing social and regional interests through the agency of the monarchy which, thereby, becomes the essential player in the political system. It remains to be seen whether King Hassan will, in the near future allow full constitutional change to a democratic system to take place, particularly once the Western Sahara crisis is resolved to Moroccan satisfaction.

In Tunisia, the failure of the Ben Ali regime to confront the issue of full popular participation in

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the political process has resulted from governmental anxieties over the threat to stability from the Islamicist Nahda movement. Despite hopes in November 1987 that the new regime would embrace the nettle of political pluralism, the threat of political Islam – partly funded from outside the country - has proved to be too great for the government to accept. At the same time, the habit of single party politics has proved too great to alow proper participation of the secular opposition, as the elections last year made clear. It remains to be seen if this regrettable slide towards the cabal politics of the latter days of the Bourguiba regime can still be countered.

The failure of the democratic experiment in Algeria, greeted with anger and regret in Europe, particularly in France, was an inevitable consequence of the way in which it had been undertaken. The Chadli ben Jedid regime had tried to exploit the Islamicist threat embodied in the FIS to destroy the pretensions of the original single political party, the FLN, so that the regime itself would have controlled power in a democratic system in which no one party could have dominated. The surprising success of the FIS in the December 1991 elections, combined with the inflammatory rhetoric used by its leadership in the immediate aftermath, persuaded the Algerian army, always the ultimate guarantor of Algeria's revolutionary tradition, to intervene to avoid both an Islamicist victory and the very realt threat of civil war. Despite the assassination of Mohamed Boudiaf, the interim Algerian president, in June 1992, the new Belaid Abdesslam government will follow the reform programme it has set itself and will eventually introduce a limited democratic system designed to avoid the potential dangers of an Islamicist victory in a country in which class, regional, ethno-linguistic and religious differences still predominate.

Perhaps the least hopeful example for reform amongst the southern Mediterranean littoral states in Syria, together with its satellite, Lebanon. Even Libya, with its peculiar system of the jamahiriyah (direct popular democracy) underpinned by a retribalisation of political life around the tribes of the ruling elite, offers more opportunity for democratic-style reform. The recent elections in Libya have been marked by a series of vociferous rejections of officially-approved candidates without any official sanction being imposed.

In Syria, however, the Asad government, based on

its root-support in Syria's minority Alawi sect, now seems to be depending on economic development fueled by oil revenues and development aid from the Gulf to restore its battered domestic credentials. In this process, the current peace process has an important part to play and Syrian behaviour in the negotiations will be conditioned by its own perceptions of domestic stability. Democratic choice is not, however, part of its domestic agenda, for the baleful perfection of Ba'athism continues to be the country's official ideology.

Lebanon, as ever, continues to be victim of its own tortured history and of Israeli interference. The recent elections, carried out under the provisions of the Treaty of Ta'if, really only confirmed that the the old za'im system and the confessional political structure were both in good health, even if the balance of power between the Maronites and Muslim groups, now led by the Shi'a, had changed. In any case, Lebanon's political choices will continue to be controlled by the ambitions and anxieties of its two regional power neighbours - Israel and Syria - and, to that extent, it will continue to be a surrogate arena for their quarrels. It is difficult to imagine that the superficial democratisation of Lebanese life can really do much to cure the terrible wounds caused by the civil war and Israel's intervention in 1982 in the near future.

All-in-all, the outlook for the growth of democratic political structures amongst the Southern Mediterranean littoral states seems poor. Those states which have engaged in limited democratic experiments face domestic and external threat to their survival. Those that have not, with the exception of Algeria, seem unlikely to engage now in such a risky enterprise. In any case, it is not clear that the experiments that have been undertaken extend beyond the form of democratic structures. There seems little popular agreement yet on the content of a democratic political process, whilst ideological contenders still present themselves as more appropriate and more authentic modes of legitimisation of the state in the Arab and the Islamic world. This development is unintentionally encouraged by many of the more aggressive policies followed by European states and the USA. It is to be hoped that they can be replaced as soon as possible by more sympathetic and informed approaches which are designed to encourage, rather than destroy, those developments towards democratic institutions that have begun to appear.