

The Hopes and Obstacles for Democracy and Human Rights among Middle Eastern Citizens

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Like any other geographical and political region of the world, the history, geography, and culture of Middle Eastern countries are interlinked with the world's affairs. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the subject of democracy and human rights protection is recognized as solution for combating the roots of terrorism in the Middle East, particularly in regards to the nationalities of terrorists. For this reason, the matter of democratization and human rights protection in the Middle East can be arbitrated as a very important subject for Western and non-Western countries. Western leaders, especially the U.S., decided to make two strategies for this subject: 1. Soft reforms for authoritarian countries which are friends of the West (Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar) 2. Regime change for those not deemed as the

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friends of the West (Iraq, Iran, Syria, and the Palestinian Authority). Basic research indicates that observation of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights has constantly been an inconvenience for the people in both of these types of regimes. This phenomenon has its roots in the lack of a proper foundation to accept the standards of the human rights and consequently has caused the behavior of the citizens of the Middle East to always be in compliance with predispositions of their political rulers. These add to the economic problems among many of the Middle Eastern countries where the people are poor but the political leaders benefit from the national wealth.

Consequently, due to the above-mentioned reasons, and also some theoretical and behavioral paradoxes in the policy of Middle Eastern governments which trip between modernity and traditionalism, the mental and psychological apprehensions of some religious believers insist on some immediate remedy for the problems. Some of them want to change their regime or to combat them by targeting the supporters of these regimes with terrorist attacks. As a consequence, these solutions always encounter challenges and frustration, in a way that the observation of human rights in the Middle East has now turned out to be a riddle. On one hand, political rulers and executive elites reject democracy (as popularly defined) and define human rights within the boundaries of their political sovereignty, and therefore: justify their unreasonable and irrational behavior against

the widespread increase of human rights in other parts of the world; take advantage of reasoning like Cultural Relativity and the double standards of the Western countries to deal with the human rights, etc. On the other hand, the masses, owing to their lack of knowledge, exploitation-ridden temperament and the presence of keeping hold of the culture of flattery, are forced to live and earn their living in a second-rate manner and peasant-like behavior accompanied by unconditional obedience, which in effect obstructs any development in human rights. In addition, mental and theoretical paradoxes of some elites to create radical, immediate solutions make more ambiguity for the concept of human rights among Middle Eastern citizens. Certainly, foreign interventions could increase the radical approaches of fundamentalists for pursuing terrorist operations.

In this research, an attempt is made to examine the relevant themes, hopes, obstacles, and the opportunities and challenges to the human rights for the Middle Eastern citizens from different outlooks. This will be completed with due consideration to the main global developments which are extensive and with regard to human rights. The main difference between this research and other research in the field is that during this study the existing realities of the Middle East, international standards of human rights as well as the positive and negative cultural, religious, national, and native resources of the region were simultaneously considered as the facilitators and inhibitors

of human rights preservation for Middle Eastern citizens. In this regard, the history of human rights in the Middle East is contemplated through historical, traditional, religious, and cultural trends of the development of the rights with a closer look at the historical challenges and achievements, chances and opportunities and present enigmas and their solutions. It is worth mentioning that the author's persistence on having a problem-solving mentality has caused some parts of the research to be accompanied with some recommendations and to give heed to the existing riddles and deadlocks on the issue.

A Citizen of the Middle East

The identity of any geographical location depends largely on the individuals residing in that particular area. Regional stature, state and union formation, and the power to influence neighboring regions are all the result of efforts by individuals who are, indeed, responsible for the strength of their community. A Japanese citizen, for instance, helps his country to maintain its world power status through his well-known stereotype traits. As we all agree, he is hardworking and ambitious and he is well disciplined. Furthermore, he has not yet lost his respect for many his country's customs and traditions. Hence, one realizes how interwoven are the strength of a society and the set of values held by its members. This is the individual that affects his environment with initiatives to create comfort for him; he predicts the

future, evaluates his past and presents a critique of his misdeeds. All these endeavors give man the status of acting as God's Caliph on earth. Accordingly, he is honorable and respectable and is capable of many valuable activities such as thinking, planning, analyzing, criticizing and systematizing. Such individual accepts or respects other people's opinions and is concerned about his community's welfare. He is busy achieving honor and glory for his country, yet he is anxious to protect his environment. Our individual is in contact with others in such a manner that is best described by Alexander Dumas' doctrine, depicted in the *Three Musketeers*: "One for all and all for one." This collective security system, which makes us act responsible towards each other, gives way to sustainable development. The pain and suffering of an individual becomes the concern of all members and the lack of security for a citizen becomes a need of well-being for all. This principle is the theme of a brilliant poem by the Iranian poet, Sa'adi:

*All human beings are in truth akin;
 All in creation share one origin.
 When fate allots a member pangs and pains,
 No ease for other members then remains.
 If, unperturbed, another's grief canst scan,
 Thou are not worthy of the name of human.*

The strength of countries such as the US and Japan and some EU countries lies in an intellectual maturity that works as the foundation

of a civil society that is technologically advanced. They are proud, not of their opportunistic or egocentric ambitions of some, but of a concern for all members and the fabric of their society. In fact, these were the qualities that brought about a unique dominance for the West rooted in the emergence and existence of commerce and a social framework, growth of cities, distribution of power among landowners, the monarchy and religious and secular authorities, formation of a national awareness and a bureaucratic system, as well as the advance of technology and military.¹

The Middle East is an important term in the domain of international relations and global politics. Defined by some, it includes the members of the Arab League plus the two Muslim countries of Iran and Turkey and the Jewish state of Israel.² (Map 2) The region is well known for holding considerable crude oil reserves and lucrative offshore fisheries. From a geopolitical perspective, this is a strategic region with a considerably large population proud of its ancient history, a cradle of many great civilizations and a birthplace of many divine religions. Such parameters give added political weight to the Middle East. However, the significance of the region is not as much due to its citizens as it is a result of its wealth of natural resources and geography. A resident of the Middle East does not manufacture oil. Rather it is oil that makes him and gives him wealth and power.

Thus, the efforts of the intellectual elites of the region to find

potential for intellectual power as a replacement for the natural wealth have always remained futile, owing to the challenges created by its self-absorbed rulers. Such heads of states favor ecological sources of power rather than intellectual or technological ones. Consequently, one cannot assume an unshakable strength possessed by an individual resident of any of the Middle Eastern communities. The civil rights of the citizens of this region are determined by the rulers, who employ scholars to generate thoughts, ideas, analyses, and future plans just to guarantee legitimacy for their totalitarian rule. The thinkers of the region have, therefore, little room to maneuver. Such a state of affairs has created an identical history and a predictable pattern of behavior for all regional states. A look at this history gives rise to hopes and fears for anyone who wishes to conduct research into the human rights situation of the region. Although an extensive civil-rights movement began two decades ago by thinkers and political activists to transform the region,³ our Middle Eastern resident has remained largely unaffected and has been concerned merely about earning a living and providing security for himself and his family. Perhaps that explains why to Middle Easterners fighting and pillaging are not unfamiliar. Under such circumstances, citizens of the Middle East have never been given the chance to examine their national or international rights. Now, fairly late perhaps, they have begun to show interest in securing civil rights.

The Historical Path

The history of the Middle East reveals a different course of the development of human rights. Once, Francis Fukuyama prophesied that all states would be transformed into liberal democracies. Recently, Michael Doyle proposed the same view and predicted this would happen within 2050-2100.⁴ Yet, one cannot help to wonder whether the course of events indicate movement in the direction of liberal democracies. Conceivably, the human rights developments may demonstrate that the Middle East is on the way of producing a symbolic reaction to events in other regions of the world. Historical evidence regarding the rise and fall of civilizations and the geographic location of the region may strongly confirm the above statement. Human rights preached by the followers of three major world religions originated in the Middle East.⁵ None of the major world religions have during their thousands of years of existence neglected to place human rights at the agenda of their teaching and preaching. 'For this reason we prescribed to the children of Israel that whoever slays a soul, unless it be for manslaughter or for mischief in the land, it is as though he slew all men; and whoever keeps it alive, it is as though he kept alive all men,' states the Holy Quran, Chapter Maidah (The Food), Verse 32.⁶ The leadership of the Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and the four succeeding Caliphs as well as the Imams of his progeny are

also worth examining. Their guidance, which came at different times but within the same context, reveals a common principle shared by all religions, which maintain that human rights are divine blessings that are bestowed upon man by the Almighty God.

'They must turn their swords into ploughshare; their spears into sickles. Nations must use not their swords against one another. Henceforth, nations must prepare not to go to war,' says the Torah, Prophet Mica Book, Chapter 4, Verse 3.⁷ Torah, The Bereshit, Chapter 1, Verse 27 states, 'God fashioned man from his own spiritual shape.' Prophet Elijah rightfully points out, 'I swear by the Earth and the Heavens that Jews and non-Jews, men and women, servants and maids are all equal in the presence of God and wilt be rewarded for nothing but their deeds.'⁸ The same teachings are stressed by the Bible, Matthew, Chapter 5, Verses 7-9, 'Blessed be the compassionates, so they wilt receive compassion; blessed be the virtuous, so they wilt go to see God; blessed be the harbingers of freedom and peace, so they wilt be named the children of God.' Also in the Bible, Gospel of Luke, Chapter 6, Verses 32-36 testify, 'And if ye love them that love you, what thank have ye? For even sinners love those that love them. And if ye do good to them that do good to you, what thank have ye? for even sinners do the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive again as much. But love your enemies, and do them good, and lend,

never despairing; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be sons of the Most High: for he is kind toward the unthankful and evil. Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful.⁹ The Holy Quran in its Hijr Chapter, Verse 13 depicts, 'O you men! Surely we have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other; surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful (of his duty); Surely Allah is knowing, Aware.' It can, therefore, be construed that the Middle East was a cradle of religions that have given practical consideration to the issue of human rights.

The historical survey of the region, however, signifies that such precious spiritual resources have not been fully exploited. There were times when the rulers of the region deprived their subjects of their rights and freedom to ensure stability of their tyrannical rule. There were also times when the influential men of the church, mosque, and synagogue neglected their duty and failed to address human rights. Unsurprisingly, the combination of the two bitter realities mentioned above has created a gloomy picture of the human rights for the region, but the fact remains that the religious teachings and precepts should be examined within their own context of time. It might be unwise to apply the instructions that worked well at a distant past to the contemporary societies of the Middle East. Accordingly, there is a need to modify these instructions and find proper approaches of

executing them. (This is addressed in chapter two.) Besides, the tools and instruments utilized to assure equality and justice in antiquity may no longer prove proper for this millennium. One way to tackle the problem is to import methods that have proven suitable as a result of the development of knowledge and wisdom in other parts of the world. These new approaches may challenge the ways religions have traditionally prescribed, but the very core of the matter, the rights of individuals, will remain intact. For this reason, the Middle East should not be afraid of global phenomena such as political parties, parliaments, councils, elections, referendum, etc. These new methods are quite practical ways to guarantee freedom and fundamental rights of individuals.

Many political systems of the Middle East have for too long disregarded these initiatives as well as their own cultural heritage. At the time when world states approved laws to safeguard human rights¹⁰ in the aftermath of the second World War, the governments of the Middle East concentrated their efforts on building their military, finding a place for religion in the political system, improving the economy, enhancing administrative mechanisms, and most importantly, taking advantage of natural resources such as crude oil.¹¹ The above issues only stabilized the political systems of the region, leaving little or no impact on the human rights situation. Regrettably though, the improvements in economic wealth could easily be tied

with the valuable cultural inheritance to tackle present-day problems of the Middle East. It is true that the West has traveled a long and bumpy road to such a progressive stance for the direction of human rights and has managed to thoroughly analyze its weak and strong points throughout the course of its history. As Huntington put it, the West can now offer a model of democracy with the following criteria: 1. A classical heritage 2. Protestant and Catholic branches of Christianity 3. European languages 4. Separation of powers regarding materialism (politics or state) and spiritualism (church) 5. The rule of law 6. Social pluralism 7. Representative bodies 8. Individualism.¹² All of the above factors helped the West to build democratic societies and safeguard human rights. During the second half of the twentieth century, choices that Western scholars offered and introduced into European countries that share many commonalities are now regarded as standard criteria for democratization. Dankwart A. Rustow, 1967, proposes four criteria for democracy:

1. Flow of information and freedom of speech;
2. Free elections and fair competition for political parties and candidate;
3. Control of government by people's representatives;
4. Periodical changes in the structure of the government and introducing new representatives based on the above factors.¹³

Although these criteria can easily be regarded as axiomatic

these days, a survey of Middle Eastern history convinces us that such principles should be put into a special framework to be reinforced here. The geopolitics of the entire Middle East reveals there is considerable sensitivity concerning the idea of who should run a country. The description of a government has changed during the last couple of centuries in some parts of the world and the question of who should run it is now answered by how the citizens would be treated.¹⁴ In the Middle East, however, there is a need for experience on human rights which has not had a chance to emerge. The factors that help bring about a better human rights situation should, therefore, be identified and introduced. Accordingly, an examination of opportunities, our next topic, seems necessary.

Chances and Opportunities

The Middle East includes the countries from Iran in Asia to Morocco in North Africa and is, therefore, looked upon as a bridge between Asia and Europe. Nonetheless, it has not been able to take advantage of its geographical location and benefit from the two economic and intellectual poles of the world- the East and the West.¹⁵ Astonishingly, the Middle East has remained basically untouched by the constructive events occurring in its neighboring regions and the little impact received has been so superficial that it is hardly worth considering. Where the constitutional movements are not long lasting,

monarchical regimes are very well established. Hence, most political structures of the Middle East are manipulated by the monarchs who are in charge of the executive as well as the legislative and judicial powers. Although Middle Eastern states have their own systems of power, all share one characteristic: their powers are not separated and/or self-regulating. Some claim that Turkey and Israel are the only states that possess legislative powers similar to those of the Western countries.¹⁶ Turkey is strategically significant to the West, since it has traditionally bridged Europe and the Middle East and now connects the old continent to the former republics of the Soviet Union in Central Asia.¹⁷ Accordingly, the West tries to keep Turkey in its camp, even though this country's culture has no resemblance to those of the Europeans. Westerners hold that Turkey still needs to improve its human rights record. Europe's somewhat favorable judgment of the Turkish political system is due to the fact that this country's democratic foundations are compared to backward institutions of other regional states. Its civil rights situation though, does not meet international standards.

Furthermore, studies on the Middle East basically focus on security issues.¹⁸ While such issues concern "High Politics", problems of human rights are unfortunately not dealt with properly or sacrificed for the sake of national security. Take Israel, for example, where the rights of sovereignty, freedom of movement, freedom of speech,

meetings and demonstrations for the Arab residents of Israel are considerably restricted for reasons of national security.¹⁹ The problem of the human rights is naturally an issue of "Low Politics" as far as the political studies of the region is concerned. Most issues that are dealt with in such studies include matters of hostilities, clashes, conflicts, crises and wars. It is no surprise, therefore, that of the 410 books published under the title of the Middle East from 1960 to 1990, 83 percent were concerned with Arab-Israeli conflicts.²⁰

A comprehensive study of the Middle East should take into account the history and culture of the region, particularly that of the present time. It is worth considering that the member states of the Arab League are all composed of majority Sunni Muslim populations except for Bahrain, Iraq and Lebanon, where Shiite Muslims are a majority. In addition, Shiite communities are minority groups in Lebanon, Syria and Saudi Arabia.²¹ Another issue to consider in the study of the region is the status of the Jewish people and the oppressive ways they have been treated throughout history. All of these issues should be taken into consideration to open a discussion on the chances and opportunities for human rights in the Middle East.

Apart from the non-Arab Muslim states of Iran and Turkey and the Jewish State of Israel, the rest of the Middle East includes Arab Muslims.²² Thus, probing the human rights situation in the Middle East would not be complete without a survey of its greater Arab

parts and the role it plays in shaping the identity of the region. The prevailing Arab nature of the Middle East and spreading of Islam in non-Arab countries such as Turkey and Iran have created both favorable and unfavorable grounds for human rights in the area. The above issues guaranteed co-existence among various states of the region at times but caused wars at other times. It is then important to realize the importance of the Arab position towards human rights and their relations with other nations in order to examine the chances and opportunities for a better human rights situation. First, the activities of the Arab League should be brought to light. The organization, been in existence since 1945; however it showed no interest in human rights until 1968. The Arab League's Resolution 2443 called for a permanent Arab Human Rights Commission to be established in 1968. Consequently, the Secretariat of the Arab League convened from December 2-10, 1968 in Beirut as the First Arab Conference on Human Rights. The commission managed to draw up a treaty for the Arab states on the issue of human rights in September 1994.

The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) has also been active in this regard and ratified the Islamic Declaration of Human Rights in Cairo's foreign ministerial meeting of the organization in 1990. Resolution 5437, approved by the Arab League on September 15, 1994, which followed the approval of the Human Rights Charter by the OIC's Cairo session, have been two major steps leaving a

tremendous impact on Arab or Islamic characteristics of the region.²³

With this, human rights issues were for the first time discussed in the region within a religious and racial framework. Noticeably, it took the Arab League, which was founded before the OIC, longer to come up with a human rights treaty. This is indicative of the fact that Middle Eastern states were reluctant to deal with the issue of human rights and adopted instead an approach that was reactionary, passive and procrastinating. The two major steps can be seen only as responses of the region to a number of international human rights treaties, calling for regional action.

Challenges and Achievements

The procrastination exercised by Middle Eastern countries in approving a charter on human rights has deep rooted causes that can be traced to the history of the region. The delay in issuing such a charter could easily be compensated by the wealth of the region and charters on human rights, even better than those of the other regions in terms of content, could be drafted. Disappointingly, as always the issue of freedom was overshadowed by the dark side of the issue: the three taboos of sex, power and superstition.²⁴ This is contrary to the five humane principles of Islam as explained by Mohammad Maki Nasri, 'Defending life, property, family, religion and human conscience. Nevertheless, these principles are easily overpowered by too many

differences infecting the whole region. Hence, these principles played little or no part in devising human rights structure for the Middle East. Some of the controversial issues are: a definition of freedom and rights; freedom of religion; equality of men and women; relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, relations between political rights and other rights, the role of religion in society; and the importance of human rights organizations.²⁵ In order to turn the above challenges into achievable objectives, the issues should be reviewed in a research-based atmosphere to arrive at the best solution for the Middle East.

As mentioned earlier, Islam has no problem with human rights²⁶ and can be used as a valuable source for obtaining a humane doctrine based on the principles of defending life, property, family, religion and human conscience. The experts in Islamic law, "Sharia," should search Islamic references and historical facts and events in the Middle East in order to draw up a universal declaration of human rights.²⁷ By employing such a methodology, some of the findings derived from *Sharia* may contradict those that are based on a rational approach; the former reasoning is based on a divine source, whereas the latter depends largely on a collective conscience. The contradiction can, of course, be blamed on the methodology that we utilize to interpret Islamic Sharia. This, however, is mostly ignored and the result is a confused Middle Eastern citizen who is in two minds about whether to side with his traditional values or accept his modern teachings.

Some examples of contradictory issues include: a collective conscience (extensively used for writing the first 20 principles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and their concern for political and civil rights, including the right to live, fair trial, freedom of speech and wage a protest rally, social and economic rights, including the right to enjoy the best standard of living, social security and insurance, right to work and have leisure time, health, education, etc.) During the following decades such rights constituted the foundation of a series of agreements that were concerned with civil and political rights, social and economic rights, racial discrimination, religious leniency, torture and the rights of women and children. A reading of Sharia, however, challenges the principles based on a collective conscience and casts doubt over their legitimacy, when it suggests precepts on appointment of women as judges, standing as a witness in the court of law for women and children, punitive laws of Islam and the religious requirements to occupy important governmental posts. This is happening at the time when the internationally agreed upon Universal Declaration of Human Rights has created a better prospect for the improvement of human rights in the world.²⁸ Most Middle Eastern states have failed to utilize their Sharia at the right time and in a proper manner.

The regional heads of states have only abused Sharia in order to justify their legitimacy problems and have used Sharia as a tool not to give in to demands for human rights.²⁹ The reasons for the Middle

East's lack of interest in creating the grounds for improvements in human rights situation can be found elsewhere. Experts in the field argue that various factors, mostly cultural, play a role here. This can be illustrated by a lack of individualism in the societies that populate the Middle East.³⁰ A well-known example would be the political structure of the Persian Gulf littoral states that depend mainly on a dynastic succession. Al-Saud, Al-Sani Al-Sabah, Al-Said, Al-Khalifah and many other dynasties view liberalism a serious threat that would eventually take away their dynastic privileges. They do not view constitutional monarchy an alternative to consider. Hence, the sheikhdoms refer to Islamic principles only to legitimize their ruling system.³¹ In fact, the argument that deems human rights inconsistent with Islamic Sharia is just an effort to maintain tribal and dynastic supremacy. Thus, fears of a global movement toward democracy and human rights are not due to discrepancies or inconsistencies within Sharia. Rather such opposition is generally due to the menace that democracy poses to the political systems of the above-mentioned states. Huntington maintains that a democratic process first puts an end to the tyrannical rule. It then establishes a democratic system through legal means and finally develops awareness and democratic foundations to guarantee political changes.³²

Muslim extremists also reject Western democracy as it has a preference for the rule of people over the rule of God. On the contrary,



the rule of people is essentially the rule of God. Furthermore, some extreme views of Islam are aimed only at saving the monarchies or seizing power. King Fahad of Saudi Arabia in an interview with Arab press on March 29, 1992, describes Western democracy as useless for Saudis. He continued by saying that democracy should be in political and social harmony with Islam and that Sharia would remain to serve as the backbone of the country.³³

Another interpretation of Islamic Sharia, which is more realistic and scientific, regards Islam as a religion of "peace", since the word Islam itself is derived from "Salaam", meaning peace. Having peace with oneself and God can only be accessible when one submits to the demand of the divine source as Muslim, or one who submits to the will of God from the word "Taslim."³⁴ People can, therefore, enjoy human rights in connection with God. And Sharia is a true source of human rights.³⁵ Nonetheless, various factors other than traditional and cultural ones should be taken into consideration. As pointed out by Huntington, "ruling cliques should be persuaded that they can also benefit from democracy and view it as their task to improve their human rights record."³⁶ The instrumental elites, government statesmen and administrators, of the Middle East should develop a proper understanding of the advantages of observing human rights and realize that their future prospects depend on reinforcing human rights. The events in post-Taliban Afghanistan clearly show that

the officials in charge now enjoy a proper conception of respecting human rights and democracy and seek to move towards a balanced development in all areas of economy, politics and culture. The political elites and government officials of the Middle East can use Afghanistan as a role model and appreciate the profits of observing human rights.

On the other hand, post-Saddam Iraq is also a good lesson for the political elites. Inattention to the issue of human rights by the former rulers of Iraq has incurred major damages to the country and its people as well as the international community. Saddam, no longer in the position of power, has freed Iraqis from dictatorship. Yet, lack of attention to the formation of the concept of human rights has slowed down the process of change in the situation of human rights in Iraq and brought about a gamut of challenges. At the same time some deem human rights, as depicted in the international law, basically a Western product and a result of the Enlightenment. Human rights can be traced back to thinkers and writers of 18th century Britain and France suggesting a blue print for human rights. Later, this inspired the Declaration of Independence of America in 1776, the Declaration of the Laws of Virginia in 1776, the Charter of the United States Laws in 1791 as well as the Declaration of Human Rights and Citizenship in the aftermath of the French Revolution in 1789, which itself became a major source of inspiration for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.³⁷ Muslim thinkers hold that many centuries before Western

human rights, abiding by the rights of the individuals were portrayed and emphasized in the Holy Quran.³⁸ "Islam paid enough attention to the rights of the people of all races and religions fourteen centuries ago. This is indicative of the fact that Islam is in essence a humane faith," says Muslim scholar, Sheikh Yusef Gharzavi.³⁹

Having said this, one must abstain from jumping into any conclusions. There is a need to clarify a point and be aware of the dual characteristic of the Middle East, as it is a region of legal considerations versus tyrannical rule, the land of freedom seekers versus the homeland of the oppressed, a place of rich thoughts versus a prison of the obstinate. Some skeptics among Arab writers testify that the human mind is unable to find the appropriate life style for humans.⁴⁰ According to this interpretation, the human mind is not only unable to find the best human condition for living, but it is not capable of deciding what procedures to adopt to achieve that favorable condition, and should refer to a divine source in order to do so. Such rigid interpretation of Islam is a result of the authoritarianism that prevailed over the Middle East for many years and a bitter product of never having a chance to experience human rights in the region. Under these circumstances, the bright side of human rights, which has always been ignored, could help bring about many advantages, while its dark side could be subjected to criticism. In practice, too, there has never been judicial support for the human rights since the bright side

of the issue is ignored and the dark side is exaggerated. This is closely related to the desires of regional despotic rulers that wish to continue depriving their citizen of their legitimate rights. Perhaps this bears some resemblance to the situation before the introduction of human rights in the West.⁴¹

Strangely enough, most of Middle Eastern countries were among the founders of the United Nations and have been involved in the decisions of the organization regarding the approval of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article One of the UN Declaration stipulates that member states should spare no effort in improving and respecting human rights in their respective countries. Only a few states refrained from signing the Declaration among them Saudi Arabia and the former East block countries.⁴² The history of the Middle East points to many paradoxical resources concerning human rights. On the one hand, there are invaluable resources for thoughts and ideas on the rights of individuals however there is no deep-seated concept or any practical solution for achieving one over the other. The wide scale violation of human rights by regional tyrants has greatly undermined the worthwhile thoughts and ideas of the region. In other words, inappropriate practice has hindered precious theories from emerging. Such liberating ideas are originally Middle Eastern and are capable of encouraging and supporting human rights in the area. □

Footnotes:

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3. William A. Gasto, "Civil Society and the Art of Association," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 22, No 2, January 2000, p. 64.
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10. Bonny Ibhawoh, "Cultural Relativism and Human Rights: Reconsidering the Africanist Discourse," *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, Vol. 19, No. 1, March 2001, pp. 44-45.
11. Bernard Reich, op. cit., P. VII.
12. Samuel P. Huntington, op. cit., pp.108-110.
13. Alan Dowty, "Is Israel Democratic?" *Israel Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, Fall 1999, p.3
14. Richard N. Hass, "What to do with American Primacy?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 5, Sep/Oct 1999, p. 40.
15. Bernard Reich, op. cit., pp. 1-2.
16. Ibid, p.6.
17. Ibid, p. 227.
18. Middle East issues are closely related to issues of high politics, such as security problems. This is indicative of the fact that the Middle East affairs have been influenced by the local and international crises.
19. Russel A. Stone, "Human Rights within Israel," in Paul J. Magnarella (ed.), *Middle East and North Africa: Governance, Democratization, Human Rights*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999, p. 179.
20. Bernard Reich, op. cit., p. 307.
21. Abdullahi A. An-Na'im, "Human Rights in the Arab World: A Regional

- Perspective," *Human Rights Quarterly*, No. 23, 2001, p. 707.
22. Bernard Reich, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
23. Abdullahi A. An-Na'im, *op. cit.*, pp. 712-714.
24. Kevin Dwyer, *Arab Voices: The Human Rights*, London: Printer Publishers, 1995, p. xi.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
26. Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights*, London: Printer Publishers, 1995, p. xi.
27. *Ibid.*, p. xii.
28. Paul J. Magnella, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
29. This is when a condition of a treaty, as maintained by the international laws, should not be in contradiction with the general concepts of the treaty itself. About the human rights treaties, as stated by the article 26 of section 1 of the Human Rights Declaration and the Action Program approved in 1993 at the Human Rights Conference in Vienna: "Human Rights Conference welcomes the progress made on the ongoing trend of the preparation of human rights documents and strongly favors international ratification of human rights treaties. All world states will be encouraged to join international documents, and keep them intact and abstain from imposing their own conditions United Nations, World Conference on Human Rights, New York: United Nations Publications, 1995.
30. Kevin Dwyer, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
31. Rolin G Mainuddin, "Democratization, Liberalization and Human Rights: Challenges Facing the Gulf Cooperation Council," in Paul J. Magnarella, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 129
34. Mahmood Moshiripouri, *Islamism, Secularism and Human Rights in the Middle East*, Boulder: Lynne Rinner, 1998, p. 2.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
36. Mahammad Mahmood Mohamedou, "The Rise and Fall of Democratization in the Meghreb," in Paul J. Magnella, *op. cit.*, p.235.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
38. Rezvan Ziadah, "Islamists and Human Rights," *Al-Monstaghbal Al- Arabia* (in Arabic), Vol. 21, No. 236, October 1998, p. 114.
39. Anna Elizabeth Mayer, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
42. *Ibid.*