

“Failocracy: Imposed Democracy and the States of MENA”

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Part 1: Failed States

Most often, the failure of the MENA states is blamed on the people who live there, who are viewed by many outsiders as incapable of creating civil societies or living by the rule of law. However, this blame is largely misplaced. It is equivalent to a situation in which an architect designs a building without doing soil analysis for the foundation, then blames the occupants of the building when the foundation fails. The architects of the democratic models employed in the MENA cannot blame the lack of civil society and rule of law for the model’s failure.

In fact, the failed states of MENA have one thing in common: the imposition of a modern democratic form that takes neither cultural diversity nor the strengths of traditional forms of government into account. If we want to reform the governments of the region, we need to look closely at the modern democratic model of government—and explore why it has fallen short.

Over ninety percent of countries (more than 150 nations) gained their independence since the end of World War I. The political orders of most of these countries has been created and imposed by the dominant powers of the time, mostly European democracies and the United States. Yet of the newly independent countries, only about 5% are considered liberal democracies. The majority can be classified either as failed states or states dominated by autocratic and corrupt rulers who control all aspects of social, political, and economic life, preventing personal or communitarian social growth and curtailing the activities of independent entrepreneurs.

To understand these tragedies, one must examine the fundamentals and the impact of the democratic model imposed upon the traditional societies of MENA. The shortcomings of the state in Iraq did not delay the imposition of the same model of government in Afghanistan; the long struggle of South Sudan for independence, with massive aid from

Western powers, resulted in the establishment of another centralized democracy—and another battle between rival warlords over control of the state treasury.

The political models imposed on these newly independent states are all forms of US constitutional democracy. By and large, the models, drawn up in written constitutions, include a central government with three supposedly coequal branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. Almost all devote a portion of the constitution to the protection of human rights against the excesses of the state.

This model has served Western nations fairly well, with some notable exceptions, including the rise of Hitler in Germany and the current disconnect between the needs of the average citizen and the actions of the government in the United States. However, the adoption of this model in the formerly colonized and traditional communities of MENA has taken a different route. In fact, these imposed political orders have prevented the natural growth of civil society and the natural emergence of rule of law, becoming instead instruments of state power. The result is despotic rulers who preside over nations with few “haves” and many “have nots,” and little attention to civil liberties. The check and balance mechanism intended for modern governments has instead become the instrument of expanded state power and social control, with the judiciary and legislature being used as instruments to stifle individual liberties. Instead of cradles of democracy, central governments have become the breeding ground of massive corruption and autocratic control, creating levels of omnipotent state power that would have been unimaginable to even the absolute rulers of the past.

Another consideration has been the imposition of federal or confederate political structures. When there are two or more large ethnic identities, such as in South Sudan, such federal political order compounds the problem by superimposing two identical modern political structures on top of each other, without addressing the inherited and existing cultural contradictions of the electorate. Again and again, this model suffers from the same problems. The interests of regional autocratic rulers clash, and federalization leads to civil war.

One reason for the failure of these imposed governments is their inability to account for and respond to the cultural diversity and traditional political structures of the MENA region. This failure has helped to sustain conflicts in a number of nations, from Iraq to Syria and Egypt.

Unfortunately, instead of adjusting for the shortcomings of the centralized government model, Western nations have responded to political crises by sending more money and military power to buttress ineffective state structures. In each case, these efforts resulted in prolonged misery for the indigenous population, without any end in sight. In retrospect, it is strange that none of these horrible outcomes were foreseen. Even stranger is the fact that with minor variations, the dominant powers have employed the same heavily-centralized government model repeatedly, yet expected a different outcome. A political model that has repeatedly created autocratic states and humanitarian disasters has never been altered—or even considered for alteration.

To understand how to correct this failure, one must start by understanding the purposes of models. A model is first a mental construct. It presents a possible explanation or action plan that will create or explain a particular outcome. It is built, tested, and altered as needed to explain a phenomenon or achieve a desired result. We use models to design aircraft, build better computers, explain economic behavior, and even create forms of government.

In the case of modern democracy, the first such model was The Articles of Confederation, formed in what is now the United States after the end of the Revolutionary War. The Articles failed, only to be replaced by the constitutional model that has served the United States—and served as a model for the world—ever since. Yet, at least in the United States, this model has undergone a number of changes over time to adjust to changing societal conditions, including amendments to provide civil rights to minority groups.

Tragically, the lessons learned from the Articles of Confederation and the US Constitution—that even democratic forms of government can and should be tested and altered as necessary—have not been applied in the nations of the MENA. Despite

repeated failures, the Western powers that hold influence have focused only on degree of action, not kind.

While focusing exclusively on this model, Western powers have consistently neglected the possibilities offered by the indigenous governmental models of the MENA, which are often more decentralized and more flexible. The strengths these models offer have been blithely ignored.

What the imposing powers have also neglected is the way in which their own modern democracies developed. The transformation of traditional societies to modernity is an evolutionary process. It requires the application of the existing knowledge about societies, indigenous customs of power sharing, and social structure. The emergence of modern political order in Europe was not imposed by outsiders, nor did civil society and rule of law emerge instantaneously. The reality is that it took over three hundred years to gradually evolve.

Despite the wishes of the West for an instant and categorical transformation in the MENA, it is simply not possible. However, the transition to a healthier democratic structure can be expedited if governments incorporate aspects of modern democracy and traditional decentralized government in MENA as positive forces for social change.

How might it work? The process will require political scientists to employ the scientific method. In this case, a new political model would be tested on a small scale in a defined environment. The predictions and outcomes would provide data that would allow the model builders to adjust their hypotheses and refine the model. If one model failed to create or explain desirable outcomes, other models should be investigated in a similar process. And to build a model that might work for MENA, we need to take a closer look at traditional government structures in the region, and the opportunities they offer.

Part II: Aging Democracy and Modern Opportunity

The ratification of The Constitution of the United States of America in 1789 marked the birth of a new modern state. However, this event had its roots in the vacuum created by the religious struggles of the 16th and 17th centuries. With its conceptual roots in the treaty of Westphalia (1648) and the subsequent recognition of the concept of sovereignty, the actual emergence of the modern nation states can be traced to 18th century Europe and in particular the removal of the absolute monarchies in France.

The modern state is characterized by national control of foreign relations and of commerce, a separation of powers, federalism, and a constitutional guarantee of individual rights and liberties. For over two hundred years, this state has been remarkably successful in providing a secure environment and in fostering the individual initiative and creativity that provide for self-actualization and contribute to the public good.

The vastness of the American frontier and its abundant natural resources provided opportunities—both social and environmental—encouraged individual creativity and innovation. The accumulation of capital, made possible in part through the institutionalization of the corporation as an organizational form, encouraged investment and entrepreneurial activity. The individual protections afforded by the new society fostered opportunities that led to amazing innovations and technological advances. Finally, the diversity of immigrants to the United States, created a “brave new world,” that broke the bonds of traditional and insular thinking and opened pathways for the exchange of new ideas.

Although inequities certainly existed during the first two centuries of the United States’ development, the belief in and possibility of equality and individual advancement simultaneously existed on a previously unknown scale. However, during the 19th and 20th centuries, corporations became a dominant form of economic organization. As laws were changed and the Constitution was reinterpreted to meet the demands of a changing society, corporations began to assume the legal rights and immunities once intended for individual citizens. Today, due in part to a concomitant concentration of rights, resources, and power in the hands of large corporations, and to a lesser extent trade unions, the modern state is on the brink of crisis, both in the US and in Europe, where Greece is only the most recent nation to suffer. There is a growing sense, often restricted to a segment of

the political community, existing institutions have ceased adequately to meet the problems posed by an environment that they have in part created.

The current political environment reveals that the American citizens are disillusioned, distrustful, and angry about conditions they believe government could solve if only it had the will and willingness to listen to their voices. What seems without question is that in some fundamental way there is a growing and potentially dangerous disconnect between the ideal of a representative democracy as understood by its citizens and its actual operation. Most Americans have an ingrained expectation of “equality,” although that concept is understood in different terms depending on one’s “place” in society. When expectations of equality and its correlate of hope for a better life—however these terms are understood—are violated, people look for someone or something to blame.

It is not necessary to agree with Huffington’s assessment—that America is in danger of becoming a “Third World” country with only two classes, the rich and the poor, nor is it necessary to view the government as utterly ineffective in the face of a greedy corporate elite to believe that something has gone awry. In a huge shift, an economy that was based on satisfaction on human needs and bargaining in the marketplace has transformed into market-controlled consumerism based on ever-growing demand for consumer goods. However, the adaptation of a consumerism economy, with its huge environmental impact, is neither suitable nor sustainable for MENA countries.

The founders of the American Republic did not, and could not have, predicted the new power structure that was in part the product of industrialization, the concentration of capital, changing conceptions of commerce, and the new consumerism. As the United States matured, its governmental powers were modified and reinterpreted. As societal conditions changed along with the growth of new economic institutions, the original “balance” so important to America’s Founding Fathers was lost.

For the nations of MENA, adopting the existing model of the modern state without considering the recent past experiences of human suffering and waste caused by this model would be totally irresponsible. Instead, the objective should be to learn from the achievements and the mistakes of this model and to try to address its deficiencies by envisioning a new political model that can theoretically address the problems of the current one by emphasizing construction of subsistence, sustainable economies.

The people of MENA nations aspire to the same kind of economic and cultural strength that the United States and other modern states have achieved. However, the conditions in MENA present a somewhat different laboratory for experimenting in the creation of a new form of postmodern community based on principles of subsisting and sustainability. Most notable is the lack of natural abundance of resources and diversity in MENA countries. However, technology plays an equalizing role, as ideas come into MENA via telecommunications, from the Internet to Facebook and Twitter. Over the past two decades, the increasing flow of global information has changed the perspective of many citizens of MENA. At the same time, improved transportation and communication has allowed the diffusion of innovation to spread much more quickly. In MENA countries the abundance of information and the visions of alternative opportunities are creating new possibilities for personal liberty, economic empowerment, and the role of government. In order to do take advantage of these possibilities, we have to consider other ways in which the role of government in MENA (and in the world in general) has changed. Over the past two centuries, government has expanded tremendously and taken on many new obligations. Traditionally, governments in the MENA region had three important functions: national defense (self preservation), administration of justice (law and order), and the provision of certain public goods (e.g., transportation infrastructure, military importance). Clearly, government has grown beyond the bounds of these simple duties, to take on everything from education and pensions to health care and many programs for the welfare of the public. The cost of providing these services as its done in modern governments, will be unbearable and impossible for these nations.

Yet if government has changed, some other factors have not. Today, as in the past, the engines of growth and social and economic prosperity are the creative and entrepreneurial individuals that cause positive disruption and change through their own unique abilities and their perseverance. However, these talents need a strong communal support to grow and flourish, and it is the duty of post modern government to provide this support by ensure the security of the nation and creating and a stable environment that fosters free trade, innovation, development, and production, and protect against internal threats such as corruption, racketeering, intimidation, and violence.

Such a government must enable all citizens to have an equal opportunity to better themselves based on personal choice, access to quality education nested within supportive communities that provides basic, infrastructural support such as housing, running water, electricity, and unfettered digital access to the rest of the world. Moreover, access to capital is a crucial for growth. Instead of the parastatal authorities making payments to a powerful individual, there would be adequate salaries for those who serve the public, such as political figures in the public sector and the police.

To achieve these requirements, a new a model of political order should be designed. And it should be based on the realities of the communities of MENA, from the bottom up.

This would not be the first time this has occurred. In the 1700s, the American colonies were somewhat isolated from the more developed nations of Europe. The wealth of the land was held by a small number of elite citizens. And the colonies were saddled with an imposed government that did not meet their needs or provide them with the personal and economic freedoms they needed to take advantages of their resources. Yet the world was beginning to enter an age of industrialization and capitalism, influenced by Adam Smith's revolutionary work on economic theory, *The Wealth of Nations*, which had been published in 1776. In this environment of repression and opportunity, the colonies introduced a republican form of government that was yet untried. And that governmental form changed everything.

Today, the nations of MENA find themselves in a similar position. They have governments that are not working as effectively as they could be. Wealth is concentrated in a tiny elite. The nations are somewhat isolated, but through the influence of technology, have begun to aspire to be more free, entrepreneurial, societies. All they need now is a new form of government that can allow them to take advantage of their human capital and let entrepreneurialism flourish.

As a first step, the successful post-modern state must find a way to level the playing field in society and redress current inequities in the power structure. To accomplish this, it should retain some of the precepts of the modern state while creating new structures and processes designed to halt the trend toward corporate dominance and provide all individuals equal access to public resources. The values underlying the modern system, including the separation of powers and the protection of individual rights and liberties,

are important and should be preserved. The structures that embody those values, however, should be modified to prevent as much as possible the undue concentration of community resources in the hands of an elite. With this objective in mind, it is time for a new s Age olution: a four-branch, community-centric government.

Part III: A New Model: Community-Centric Government

In the past two centuries since the advent of the modern state, our understanding of the government's role has changed. From an independent entity that makes possible advances in human progress to a platform that makes human advances possible. Today, we almost universally understand and agree with the idea that individual creativity, collaboration, and entrepreneurship are the source of human development. However, current government structures do not reflect this development. We need a new model to respond to these current realities. The best way to create such a model is to start with a clearly defined understanding of some of the core principles of government, social structures, and economics:

1. Absolute power breeds absolute corruption.
2. Concentrating political power and control of wealth among a few individuals creates corruption and cronyism.
3. Creativity, collaboration, perseverance, hard work and entrepreneurship are the driving engines of social change, progress, and economic development.

This understanding played a key role in the creation of a new model for government in MENA. We call it Community-Centric Government. The goal of this system is to promote “participation in decision-making, social creativity, political self-determination, a fair distribution of wealth and tolerance for the diversity of all individual citizens and promotion of self-reliance.” An association of content-driven small-scale would best achieve these autonomous communities bonded through shared values and rituals. Community-Centric government creates just such an association.

A New Unit of Local Government

Most modern nations are politically divided into states or provinces. These large units are often determined by geography or for the convenience of the Central government.

Instead, we propose a new, more local political division: the Community. As we define it, the A community is a geographically-contiguous area with a maximum of 300,000 people. The community government will serve this area directly, providing services, education, health and welfare, housing, and other needs.

Much of the power behind community government comes from the Community's citizens themselves. Each citizen will be required to provide one day of work per month free of charge for the community's benefit. Funding for services and materials will be provided by payment of a per-capita lump sum by the Central Government to the Community Government. Community Governments will function on a largely autonomous basis; that is, each community government will decide its own priorities and responses to community needs while complying with the state's laws.

Epitomizing Power in Central Government

In the Community-Centric model of government, the power of the Central Government is epitomizing but limited. The Executive Branch is highly specialized, responsible only for collecting all taxes, national defense, and protection of individual rights of citizens against Community Government excesses. The Executive Branch will provide Community Governments with lump-sum cash payments based on population. This reduces the potential for lobbying and corruption within the Central Government. It also helps to protect the individual rights of citizens.

In part, because they are often homogeneous, traditional communities can be constraining and authoritarian, and can take a tyrannical approach to free will and individual freedom. Communities that balance both diversity and unity can provide a counterweight, but these can only form with incentive. Funds delivered from the Central Government, which can, of course, be withheld if human rights are violated, provide powerful incentives for the formation of diverse, cooperative groups of citizens who respect each other's rights.

A Fourth Branch of Central Government

The second element of our model is a new vision for the national government. In the Community-Centric model, the government at the national level will be primarily

responsible for providing national security, guaranteeing individual rights within the communities, and collecting taxes. There will be four co-equal branches of government:

- Executive
- Legislative
- Judicial
- National Trust Fund

While the first three government branches are common to most contemporary democracies, the fourth branch will need some explanation. In the Community-Centric model, the National Trust Fund is designed to ensure that all society members get a fair share of the profits from national resources. An example of a similar government entity is the Alaska Permanent Fund, set up by Alaska, a state within the United States. All Alaska citizens receive an annual payment based on the value of oil extracted from the state by petroleum companies.

The National Trust Fund would be different from the Alaska Permanent Fund in a significant way. Rather than giving direct payments to every citizen, The National Trust Fund would use its share of profits from the commercial exploitation of resources to provide low-interest loans to entrepreneurs. The goal of these loans would be the creation of an entrepreneurial and sustainable— economy. This would foster great change in MENA, where natural resources extraction has tended to benefit only a few and foster a concentration of power that limits innovation and personal freedom.

Much of this change will be made possible by technology. The power of postmodern technology empowers MENA citizens to reach the rest of the world from their own homes. In such an environment, the concentration of labor is less and less important. People can use their computers and modems at home to do a good part of their office work, from processing insurance claims to trading worldwide or providing services for companies thousands of miles away. The successful communities are the ones that can best train the individuals with exceptional entrepreneurship abilities. In such communities, inequality among citizens is significantly reduced while social order and autonomy are balanced rather than maximized.

Power and Trust Networks

The Community-Centric model of government is not revolutionary in changing society's socioeconomics, as it intends to create change within the structure of politics. The model uses existing and newly-formed social groups, trust networks, and individuals to rearrange MENA's traditional political structures and create a recognizable yet more responsive form of government. While these political structures must evolve, they are already familiar. In fact, they have been in place throughout much of MENA for centuries, albeit informally. Instead of uprooting traditional governments, the goal is to enhance them by encouraging the growth of indigenous government and localized entrepreneurship to lead to better community life for all.

By limiting the central government's power and expanding local power, Community-Centric Government creates a clearinghouse for allocating resources to local community members based on their specific needs. Influential community members will be engaged in providing services to their citizens—and disengaged from destructive national power politics. Local efforts will involve a bargaining process among citizens invested in their community members, which ensures that money and political power are not concentrated in the hands of autocratic individuals or a single trust network. These interactions on the ground will increase trust and build relationships among different factions within the community.

At the same time, the Community-Centric Government's service requirement will provide an estimated 10,000 persons that daily provided the needed free labor to a Community, which helps it to implement local policies. This will create the sense of citizen entitlement and ownership that is the basis of the civil society and the rule of law.

Protection of Individual Rights

Under the Community-Centric model, the Central Government will be responsible for protecting individual freedoms. A great deal of the leverage in this undertaking will be provided by the lump sum cash payments to each Community. Because they know that the continuance of these payments depends upon, among other things, the protection of human rights within the community, local leaders will be more likely to protect those rights.

Perhaps more important, the community, the government, will deny the central government the modern central bureaucracy or the social apparatus to repress the

population; even autocratic rulers will lack the means to implement social controls. The Central Government will need independent communities to govern and rule. In this regard, the relationship between Community Government and Central Government resembles MENA's traditional rulers, who provided statewide security, but allowed a great deal of autonomy on the local level. It is by looking to the past and making sensible modifications to both traditional and modern forms of government that MENA can look forward to a brighter future.

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