

## Featured Publication & Special Members Only Downloadable Chapter

ILA Members publish on the topic of leadership from a variety of perspectives. We are pleased to feature a selection of these publications in this newsletter and our website.

In the *Member Connector*, authors take you behind the scenes, sharing their perspectives on the work, how the work informs contemporary issues, and highlighting points of interest to ILA members.

Thanks to ILA member Adel Safty for contributing to this issue.



## Featured Publication *Leadership & Democracy*

by Adel Safty,  
(International Partnership for Service  
Learning and Leadership, 2004)

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*ILA Staff Member:* **Some people argue that there are certain cultures that are inherently antithetical to democracy. Do you agree? Why or Why not?**

*Adel Safty:* Some political writers, particularly people like Bernard Lewis, have suggested that certain cultures, especially in the Muslim world, are inherently inhospitable to democratic institutions.

I think this a mistaken view. The series of democratic revolutions in the late 1980s and early 1990s, spearheaded by people with vastly different ethnic, religious, socio-economic, and political culture backgrounds suggest there is no reason to believe that Islam,

Confucianism, Catholicism, African or Asian values cannot promote a culture of civil society and democratic institutions.

Neither Communism in Central and Eastern Europe, Confucianism and Buddhism in Mongolia or Taiwan, nor Islam in Egypt, Yemen, Algeria, Jordan, Philippines, and Indonesia prevented the emergence of a culture of civil society and democratic reforms.

Democracy driven by the people came to Bulgaria, a largely agrarian country with virtually no bourgeoisie. It came to Muslim Albania, a country that had no relationship with a former British colonial power (as some writers claimed such a relationship predicted success for democracy in developing countries). Democracy also came to Muslim Bosnia-

Hercegovina, but faltered in Austro-Hungarian- influenced Croatia.

Democracy came to Poland driven not by the bourgeois merchant class and property and business owners, but the very working class some claimed could not support democratic institutions.

Democracy also came to East Germany and Lithuania helped, not hindered, by the progressive role played by the religious leaders of the church in these countries. It came to Muslim Indonesia, which had no recent democratic experience, having known only two presidents from independence until 1998: Sukarno and Suharto.

If there is one lesson to be learned from these democratic revolutions, it is that the yearning for freedom and life with dignity is a universal

urge rooted in our humanity, not in the vagaries of our ethnic and cultural diversity.

**Why is leadership important to the successful establishment and maintenance of democracies? Is it the most important factor in predicting success?**

Not any leadership would do. The problem with leadership is that as a term it is used indiscriminately to mean authority, power, management, administration, military commandment, or high political office. What I mean by leadership here is what I call value leadership, that is leadership that is normatively defined and operationally directed towards adding value to our common human development. In this sense, a CEO who has been principally interested in the equity of shareholders as opposed to the interest of all stakeholders, including citizens, community, environment, and social interactions, may be a successful manager, but not a value leader. A holder of high political office may be a president or a ruler, but not necessarily a leader if his or her actions are narrowly focussed on his own constituencies.

The test of leadership is therefore that it be more than management, more than governance, more than successful administration and more than commandment of great armies. All of these are neutral terms. Leadership by definition is value based. To my thinking it means rising above the parochial interests to defend and promote the human interests, the most important of which is the moral imperative of advancing and adding value to our common

human development.

In this sense, leadership is democratised. It can be exercised by anyone dedicated to its values and willing to work hard to convince others to do the same. In this sense, it is separated from office or power. This was clearly illustrated in the democratic revolutions that swept across Eastern Europe, started by civil society organisations where the people led.

Leadership is important because democracy needs assertive leadership to defend and promote its unfinished project of a just society. Democracy needs leaders: leaders in political office committed to the fundamental values of democracy as well as leaders in citizen movements and non-governmental associations constantly renewing their commitments to the democratic values of freedom and equality. Mussolini and Hitler were great leaders by the traditional definition of leadership, which focuses on oratory skills, motivation, a large project, and mesmerizing charisma. But they fail miserably by the test of value leadership because their fundamental project did not seek to promote democratic values and human development, but sought to subjugate people and races to their racist vision.

US President Jimmy Carter sought to inject respect for human rights into international relations and

showed restraint when urged to use massive power against Iran during the American hostage crisis in 1979-1980. He won a Noble Peace Prize, but is generally criticised as a weak leader by those who continue to equate leadership with power.

Success therefore as a value leader requires first and foremost a commitment to the moral dimension of leadership, as opposed to its conventional meaning of power and authority, commitment to people's welfare before commitment to special constituencies' interests.

But the values of democracy seem alien to Arab governance. The basic democratic principle of government on behalf of the people and for the people is not reflected in the daily lives of ordinary Arabs. And it is a widely shared perception. A recent show on Al Jazeera Television asked viewers: "Have the existing Arab regimes become worse than colonialism?" 76 percent of callers said yes.

**In the first part of the book you discuss the history of democracy and democratic thought, particularly in the West. What are the 3 most important points people should know about the history of democratic thought and practice?**

I would like to emphasise the following points:

A. Democracy should not be taken for granted. It needs support and reaffirmation. It is dependent upon and strengthened by the participation of its citizens in the political process (Madison); by the civic and general education of its people (Mill); by the separation and balance of powers in its branches of government (Montesquieu); by decentralisation and an

independent judiciary (de Tocqueville); by the dedication of its institutions to identifying and training leaders (Jefferson), and, significantly, by the commitment of its leaders to upholding the democratic values of liberty and equality (Lincoln).

B. All cultures and systems of beliefs can promote a culture of democratic values and institutions. A corollary to this has been the demonstration of the link between democracy and leadership. Philosophers and democratic leaders agree on the importance of education and participation. Madison insisted that only participation in the political process could preserve

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and enhance individual liberties. Mill maintained that education and participation were essential for representative governments to succeed. Jefferson argued that civic education is essential for building a republic that could develop moral faculties.

C. In the West, the transition to democracy as we know it today was not the result of previous democratic experience, but rather of a gradual process of evolution, aided by struggles and revolts against absolute power, slavery, and inequality. It took a war to abolish slavery in the United States, and a long struggle to enfranchise women in the Western world. Democratic changes, under the best of circumstances, came gradually. This last point is of particular relevance in view of the belief in certain quarters that democracy should be spread by

force.

**The middle chapters of the book look at contemporary examples of regions that are currently engaged in the struggle for democracy. Chapter 11, for example, looks at the Middle East. What are the democratic traditions and history of this region? What are the particular challenges people in this region face in their struggle for democracy and, what are the possibilities?**

The cultural and historical context of governance in the Middle East and the Arab world have been marked by the legacy of imperial involvement in the region, the emergence of Arab nationalism, the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine and the subsequent Arab-Israeli conflict. It has also been marked by the geo-strategic importance of the region and its oil resources, and the Cold War calculations of the superpowers. Recently, the emergence of political Islam as a competing alternative to secular Arab nationalism has presented challenges and opportunities for governments to broaden the basis of their popular support and promote initiatives of democratisation.

The democratic principles of contract between ruler and ruled, popular participation in governance and tolerance of

differences of opinions find their roots in traditional Islamic thought.

The Egyptian progressive Islamic thinker Mohammed Abdu believed that Islam was a religion fully compatible with modern rational thought, while preserving divine transcendence. Carrying further the thought of other progressive Islamic thinkers, such as Tahtawi, Khayr al-Din, and al-Afghani, Abdu equated certain traditional

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concepts of Islamic thought with some of the ideas dominant in European thought: maslaha gradually turns into utility, shura into parliamentary democracy, ijma' into public opinion. The shura in particular is a central component of Islamic political system. It was designed to provide for popular political participation and citizen influence in policy-making decisions. A 'shura' is a consultative council, elected by the people. There is consensus that Islam teaches principles of freedom, equality, human dignity, and the

rule of law, but that authoritarian political rule and restrictive interpretations of the Koran obstruct a liberal and modern application of its principles.

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viewers: "Have the existing Arab regimes become worse than colonialism?" 76 percent of callers said yes.

I think most people in the Middle East would welcome a good faith decision from the United States to stop supporting autocratic regimes. I also think such a decision would trigger popular demands for freedom and liberty as rights not as privileges granted by rulers. The protracted Palestine conflict and the absence of a genuine peace in the region further dramatised by the invasion and occupation of Iraq, create an atmosphere of tension and instability used by rulers to perpetrate autocratic institutions and delay much needed democratic reforms.

### **Is the current Iraq war good or bad for democracy in this region? Why or Why not?**

The war in Iraq has given rhetorical emphasis to democracy, but the people of the Middle East are not convinced that the war is for democracy and reject the paternalistic attitude involved in that approach. They do not hate American values, but hate American policies, especially the one sided-support for Israel against Palestinian rights, and support for what they describe as tyrannical Arab regimes in the region. This is the conclusion of a report on strategic communication published by the Pentagon in September 2004. The report also stated: "American direct intervention in the Muslim World has paradoxically elevated the stature of and support for radical Islamists, while diminishing support for the United States to single-digits in some Arab societies."

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The war in Iraq brought the procedure of democracy but the very values of democracy are negated by the presence of foreign troops that essentially deny the people the first of all democratic principles: namely that sovereignty resides in the people, not in foreign troops.

Even within these limitations, the massive privatisation programmes introduced by the occupation authorities have fundamentally changed the nature of the Iraqi society on the unproven premise that capitalism and the rise of an indigenous bourgeoisie have an impact on democracy. They will certainly have an impact on the nature of the market economy that is being introduced and its openness to free trade and foreign investments, but this does not necessarily mean an impact on democracy. It is far more likely that democratisation and the development of a thriving civil society will be a function of leadership, exercised at the grass root level and gradually institutionalised.

**How can concerned organizations and people help to promote the principles and practices of democratization and good governance both at home and abroad? Is there anything individuals can do, or is it in the hands of large**

### **national and international organizations? What role can formal leadership education play?**

I think the people-led democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe have clearly shown what individuals can do: getting involved, defending the values of democracy: liberty, equality, rule of law, and respect for human rights, opposing war and promoting a culture of peace. Everyone can play a role from being involved in a civil society organisation, to organising your grass root organisation to defend a particular cause, to writing to the editor of your local and national newspaper to express and defend a democratic value, to writing to your representative in parliament to urge him or her to defend the values for which they were elected.

But perhaps the most significant contribution we educators can make is to help institutionalise formal leadership education through the curriculum at schools and universities so that the democratic values and the principles of responsible citizenships that make them possible become the tools through which people can be self-empowered.

Only an empowered citizenry can defend the values of democracy and preserve and advance our common achievements in human development.

**Did the events of 9/11 affect the progress of democratization around the globe? If so, how? And, were these favorable or unfavorable changes?**

I think the events of September 11 are a tragedy that nothing can justify. I also think that the response to it has been simplistic in the sense that a global war against an ill-defined terror can lead to perpetual conflicts and wars without end. Certainly, the history of democracy suggests that the tensions inherent in democracy can only be tamed gradually and in an evolutionary manner if we are to avoid major upheavals and conflicts. This requires long-term commitments to building and strengthening the institutions of democracy. A climate of confrontation and fear in which multilateral organisations

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are relegated to the background and force is sanctioned as a principle instrument of international relations is neither conducive to capacity building nor to the free and responsible exercise of leadership, both of which are fundamental principles for the establishment and promotion of democratic institutions.

The favourable developments for democracy have taken place before the events of September 11. This is evident in the spread of peaceful democratic revolutions that started in the late 1980s. It is evident in the leadership role multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the United Nations Development Program, the World Bank, and other institutions, in adopting major orientations and programs around such themes as democratic governance, sustainable development, peace building, leadership development, poverty reduction, and in making

a commitment to pursue these and other common human concerns as are part of the millennium goals agreed by world leaders at the millennium conference.

**In 2003 you were elected President of the Global Leadership Forum. For ILA members who may not have heard about the forum, what is it and how can they get involved?**

The Global Leadership Forum (GLF) was established as a follow up to the United Nations Leadership Conferences I organised in the 1990s. The GLF seeks to promote a multidisciplinary and multicultural conception of leadership, which I call Value Leadership: Leadership that promotes the interconnectedness of peace, democracy, and development in public policy, social corporate responsibility in the private sector, and multilateral and multicultural cooperation to address and solve common human concerns. The 7th Global Leadership Forum is scheduled for June 23-26, 2005 in Istanbul, Turkey.

The GLF has been supported by the UN, the World Bank, governmental and non-governmental organisations, and by the private sector. It has brought together hundreds of participants from around the world and has benefited from its partnership with the leading executive education organisation in the United States, the Center for Creative Leadership. It has been sponsored by the School of Government and Leadership, which has published its proceedings in a number of volumes including *New Paradigms for Leadership, Global*

*and Multidisciplinary Leadership, Value Leadership, and The Future of Leadership.*

**Is there anything else you'd like to add about your book *Leadership and Democracy*?**

I argue in *Leadership and Democracy* that more than ever we need to illuminate the relationship between leadership and democracy and understand how intrinsically they are linked. Leadership has been democratised in the sense that it can and should be the concern of all responsible citizens. And democracy more than ever depends on the responsible exercise of leadership in support of its underlying values. Such an understanding along with an active commitment to promoting it, I think, is the best guarantee for promoting human development for the benefits of all, and to create and sustain caring communities, locally and globally.

**Don't miss the 7th Global Leadership Forum!**

**June 23-26 in Istanbul**

**"Leadership and Democratic Governance: Multicultural Peace-Building, Corporate Social Responsibility, leadership Development"**

**To register or for more information contact Mrs. Evrim Firat:  
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Visit the member area of the ILA Web site to find additional information on *Leadership and Democracy* and download The Introduction and Chapter One, "*Democratisation and Governance.*"