

So, You Think Democracy Will Be Good For The Middle East? Think Again!

The following was written by Tom Robinson

In discussing democracy, it's important to specify what is meant. Pure democracy is simply the rule of the majority. That may sound great and even practical—unless you are in the minority and the issues concern your well-being and perhaps even your life.

A popular adage, anonymous but often misattributed to Benjamin Franklin, says in one of its forms, "*Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch.*" Majority rule is, in essence, the tyranny of the majority, wherein dissenters are oppressed. At its worst, it can devolve into mob rule, a fearful circumstance that can break down into anarchy and calls for authoritarian clampdown by a single leader.

American Founding Father John Adams said: "Remember, *democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide.* It is in vain to say that democracy is less vain, less proud, less selfish, less ambitious, or less avaricious than aristocracy or monarchy. It is not true, in fact, and nowhere appears in history. Those passions are the same in all men, under all forms of simple government, and when unchecked, produce the same effects of fraud, violence, and cruelty" (letter to John Taylor, April 15, 1814).

With such thoughts in mind, America was founded as a republic. In a republic, representatives represent the interests of constituents in a voting assembly. When these representatives are chosen by the populace, the form of government is called a democratic republic, which is the case with the United States. Of course, some countries refer to themselves as democratic republics even if truly free elections are absent. Communist regimes are notorious for this.

Yet even a true democratic republic does not necessarily promote freedom. The forces of democracy are still at work in selecting representation. A takeoff on the humorous quote up front notes that in a republic, *the flock gets to vote for which wolves vote on lunch.* The question is, what do the majority support? Are they selfish, or do they care about others? This is why Adams earlier said: "OUR CONSTITUTION WAS MADE ONLY FOR A MORAL AND RELIGIOUS PEOPLE. IT IS WHOLLY INADEQUATE TO THE GOVERNMENT OF ANY OTHER" (military address, Oct. 11, 1798). It is clear from other quotes that the religion he had in mind was

Christianity. It certainly was not Islam, which he inveighed against severely elsewhere.

The religion of Islam has itself been an oppressive force in the Middle East. Yet ironically, it has been held in check by the totalitarian regimes of the recent past. The rise of democracy in this region where the common people are predominantly Muslim fundamentalists could spell increased imposition of sharia (Islamic law) domestically and a step up in jihad (struggle or holy war) abroad.

Consider the Palestinians. Free elections in Gaza handed the government over to Hamas, a terrorist organization devoted to wiping out the state of Israel. And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

There is great concern about Egypt, the most populous nation in the Arab world, as well as many other Muslim nations. One source reports: "Much of the Egyptian population that in recent days has rebelled against the thirty-year regime of Hosni Mubarak says that it prefers democracy to any other form of government. At the same time, however, and IN AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY, THEY WANT THOSE WHO COMMIT ADULTERY TO BE STONED, THIEVES TO HAVE THEIR HANDS CUT OFF, AND THOSE WHO ABANDON THE MUSLIM RELIGION TO BE PUT TO DEATH. This is the result of a survey conducted in Egypt and in six other majority Muslim countries by the Washington-based Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, the world leader for research in this field" (Sandro Magister, "*'Democratic' Egypt Sends Apostates to Their Death,*" *chiesa.expressonline.it*, Feb. 3, 2011).

According to the survey, this is true of majorities in Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan and Nigeria. Only in Turkey and Lebanon were these minority positions. But fundamentalism has made headway in Turkey, while in Lebanon the terrorist organization Hezbollah has recently achieved a dominant position in the government.

The Pew survey further stated that 54 PERCENT OF EGYPTIANS WANT TO END THEIR NATION'S PEACE TREATY WITH ISRAEL ("*Egyptians Back Sharia Law, End of Israel Treaty, Poll Shows,*" Bloomberg, April 26, 2011). And "in a runoff between modernizers and fundamentalists, 59 percent of Egyptians say that they side with the fundamentalists, against 27 percent who root for the former... *Returning to the death penalty for those who abandon Islam, called for by 84 percent of Egyptians, it must be pointed out that those who want it are men and women, old and young, educated and uneducated, without distinction.* In Jordan, the level of support for sentencing apostates to death rises all the way to 86 percent" (Magister).

Here's a clear case, then, where democracy does not equate to freedom.