

The background of the cover is a photograph of a Swiss village. In the foreground, a river flows through the town, reflecting the buildings and the sky. A large, stone church with a tall, dark spire is the central focus of the village. The houses are colorful, with yellow and white facades. In the background, two large, rugged mountains are covered in snow, with some evergreen trees clinging to their slopes. The sky is a pale, overcast blue.

# JUIS

Journal of Undergraduate International Studies

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# letter from the editor

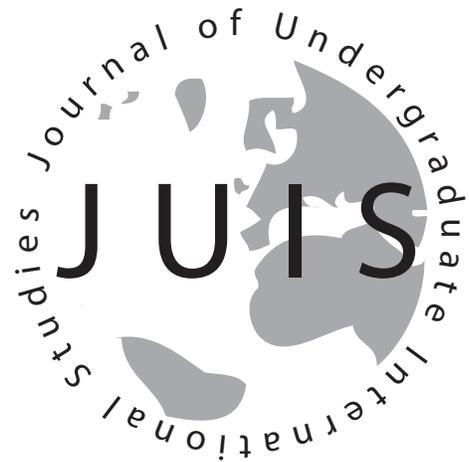
Dear Reader,

I am pleased to present the fall 2009 issue of the Wisconsin Journal of Undergraduate International Studies. We received many high-caliber submissions from a host of undergraduate institutions all over the United States pertaining to a diverse range of subjects: historical pieces of secessionist conflicts, analyses of Cold War politics, and criticisms of the War on Terror in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We also received a piece pertaining to the rhetoric of studying abroad, a salient topic for many students in International Studies, which we selected as this issue's featured piece.

Our featured essay, written by Lisa Braverman of Indiana University, is entitled *Imagined Experiences: Performance, Rhetoric, and Study Abroad* and appears on page 14. The other selected pieces represented unanimous favorites by the editorial board and we hope that you enjoy reading them as much as we did.

Sincerely,

Amjad Asad,  
Editor-in-Chief



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## Journal of Undergraduate International Studies

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The photo on the front cover was taken by Laura Burns in Hallstatt, Austria called "The Town Awakens" and was provided courtesy of University of Wisconsin - Madison International Academic Programs.

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# staff bios

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**AMJAD ASAD**, Editor-in-Chief

Amjad Asad is the Editor in Chief of JUIS, pursuing majors in Political Science and Spanish. Beginning in March, he will be studying in Lima, Peru for a year. In his spare time, he enjoys getting engrossed in America's Next Top Model marathons and mimicking MadTV skits.



**ALEX HOPPE**, Editor

Alex is a student of psychology, social theory, and philosophy. He is also a connoisseur of funk music in all its classic and derivative forms and especially recommends George Clinton and Herbie Hancock.



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Kate Guadagnino is a senior majoring in English and Political Science. She is planning a tentative entry into the real world that will hopefully reflect her interests in writing and striking split infinitives.



**RASHID DAR**, Editor

Rashid Dar is a man among men, a child among children, an animal among animals, and a 250lb bench-pressing poet among the very few other 250lb bench-pressing poets. With quite androgynous characteristics and a knack for knitting sweaters for pets, Rashid's talents exceed those of the average individual. He's also a junior at Wisconsin majoring in Middle East Studies and International Studies, with a focus on global security. Furthermore, he takes a personal interest in the 'Muslim world' and the role of religion in that part of the globe."



**REBECCA NEWMAN**, Editor

Rebecca Newman is currently a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin - Madison who manages her extracurriculars and double major in International Studies and Economics with the help of caffeine pills and an unhealthy amount of candy consumption. She is from Connecticut, but her heart is in New York City and until she runs back the day after graduation, she shows her hometown pride whenever Jay Z's "Empire State of Mind" comes on. Rebecca plans to spend the next year abroad in Madrid and is very excited. However, she is hoping that the fact that she can barely speak Spanish won't have too much of an effect on her classes and social life.



**LIBBY VERTZ**, Editor

Libby Vertz is a sophomore at UW-Madison, originally from Waukesha, Wisconsin. She is majoring in Spanish and journalism, and upon graduation hopes to work in the magazine industry, for a travel magazine specifically. In the meantime, she enjoys running and swimming, in hopes to one day replace expensive plane rides with the aforementioned activities; Cuba is only 90 miles from Key West, after all.



**XANDER YANT**, Editor

Xander Yant is a freshman hailing from Chicago, Illinois. His principal interests include international topics, languages, classical/symphonic metal music, singing, and chillin' like a villain. After graduation, he aspires to use his international knowledge and East Asian language skills in a teaching or government job.



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Patrick is a sophomore majoring in English and Philosophy. He likes to spend his time contemplating the significant impact Neil Gaiman and Battle Star Galactica have on his life. One day he hopes to justify such ruminations through the money he will earn professing such topics at a university.



**ALEXIS BROWN**, Editor

Alexis Brown is a sophomore pursuing a double major in history and English. She has periodically emerged from Memorial Library this semester seeking the occasional meal/nap, often only to be blinded by the sun, or a pair of unflattering leggings. She wishes she could speak Hmong. Her hobbies include starbursts, cornflakes, and teaching munchkins how to figure skate.



**NICHOLAS LILLIOS**, Editor

Nicholas Lillios is a junior majoring in political science and biochemistry. His academic interests lie in global health policy and human rights in developing nations. He is currently a fellow at the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress in Washington, D.C., and hopes to pursue a career in medicine and public health.



**JENNIFER KERASTAS**, Graphic Designer

Jennifer Kerastas is a graphic design major at the University of Wisconsin Madison. She is currently auditing additional classes and plans on moving back to her home town of Chicago.

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# CURBING COAL:

## China's Pollution-Reduction Policy

by AARON BARR

### HOW MIGHT CHINA'S

leadership best effect a reduction in industrial coal burning-related air pollution? Strict governmental enforcement of targeted environmental law is one possible solution. A different approach would employ government subsidies and corrective taxation as pollution-reduction incentives. Which policy would require greater overall government expenditure? Which would be more difficult to implement? Once implemented, which would be more easily subverted, whether through noncompliance or fraud? To evaluate both policy alternatives, these questions will be considered in turn.

China is the world's leading coal producer and consumer: experts estimate that 11% of global coal reserves lie beneath Chinese soil.<sup>1</sup> Almost 75% of its energy comes from its own largely low-grade high sulfur coal; as a consequence, smoke from burning coal is the main source of air pollution in China.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, seven of the top ten most air-polluted cities in the world are in China,<sup>3</sup> and the impact on the health

of urban residents is alarming: emphysema and bronchitis are the leading causes of death.<sup>4</sup> In 1997, there were 178,000 premature deaths among urban Chinese due to pollution; without change, by 2020 there will be 5.5 million cases of chronic bronchitis and 600,000 annual premature deaths.<sup>5</sup> 7.4 million work-years are lost annually to health problems stemming from air pollution; in 1995, pollution was estimated to cost 54 billion dollars per year, or approximately 8% of GDP.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, given the abundance of China's coal resources, its comparative paucity of other domestic fossil fuels, and its extensive coal-processing and coal-burning technological investment, it seems most practical for China to focus its efforts on improving its usage of coal, rather than on cultivating other energy sources, at least for the time being. We shall employ the assumption that "using coal as the primary energy source is a long-term national necessity"<sup>7</sup> as we proceed through the rest of the paper.

Without intervention, China's economy will increasingly be strained by severe environmental degradation. The leaders of China must find a way to combat pollution without throttling the economy. They can choose to achieve necessary reductions either through mandated emissions standards, or by offering incentives to change.

Mandated emissions standards would very likely seem both agreeable and logical to China's leadership, which already has extensive experience implementing top-down directives. Essential bureaucratic apparatus to implement orders from the top is either already in place or could be created from existing structures. Moreover, thanks to centuries of government mandates, the populace is accustomed to such initiatives and familiar with its role in responding to them. From the standpoint of government planners, this strategy could yield precise and directly controllable results. If anti-pollution policy measures were carried out with sufficient vigor, the effect on pollution would be



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immediate and dramatic, while mandated standards, so long as they were feasible, would be met consistently and reliably.

Financial incentives, although not historically favored by China's leadership, could be argued to be particularly well-suited to address China's current needs. Properly implemented subsidies could simultaneously fight pollution and supply a welcome investment in China's energy infrastructure; 'greening' China's cities could avert environmental and public-health catastrophes, while improving China's physical capital would increase the country's economic vitality.

Moreover, revenues from corrective taxation could be used to fund yet more subsidies in turn, channeling resources from weakness to strength. Thus, while providing a strong incentive not to pollute, the government could simultaneously reward behaviors it deems more environmentally friendly. Government expenditures would be applied directly to problems; theoretically, this would result in a more effective use of precious government funds than could be accomplished by indirect methods. Hence, achieving a unit reduction in pollution could be less costly. This approach would also give government planners more flexibility in determining what, where, and how much pressure to apply to different sectors of society, since different mixes of tax/subsidy policy tools could be used and those tools would be far more scaleable than simpler emissions controls. In addition, because no coercion would be needed to compel people to line up for subsidies, and transactions would be conducted at a high level in the economy, it seems that noncompliance would be reduced, although whether or not this would be the case in practice will be treated later in this paper.

## MANDATED EMISSIONS STANDARDS

### EXPENDITURE.

What level of government expenditure would be required to institute and monitor mandated emissions standards to combat China's coal-related air pollution?

Currently, China's Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) is responsible for monitoring pollution, handling ongoing environmental issues and enforcement, and providing the Center with information on sustainable environmental policy. Given China's immense geography and multitude of heavily industrialized cities, combined with the fact that "the massive number of small furnaces and kilns, especially those operated by township and village industrial enterprises, generally lack emissions control,"<sup>8</sup> training and deploying a veritable army of inspection personnel would be obligatory for the monumental task of identifying sites not in compliance with coal-burning pollution standards. Local officials are unlikely to be reliable partners in this effort, as nearly all have personal and financial ties to their local businesses and industry. Hence, a national level inspection team with real political muscle behind it would be essential for this policy to be effective. An immense investment in personnel, training, and equipment would be required, making this strategy very costly indeed. Moreover, these outlays would be merely that; all these funds would be put toward the construction and maintenance of a colossal inspection apparatus, with none of the government expenditures yielding useful direct investment in infrastructure or any of a myriad of government social welfare programs critically in need of funds.



## IMPLEMENTATION.

What difficulties would arise with the implementation of mandated pollution standards?

Instituting pollution standards by fiat necessitates imposing coercive power from the Center in Beijing all the way down to fairly low levels of government. Such an expansion of centralized power and diminution in autonomy of regional governments would assuredly meet with implacable resistance from the lower levels. An assumption of power by the central authorities would no doubt be viewed, not only as a sinister reversal of Deng Xiaoping's now sanctified policy of increased decentralization and regional autonomy, but also an indirect assault on the strong ties of money and *guanxi* between local officials and the industrial interests within their networks.

Furthermore, difficulties in determining sustainable emission standards would be legion. A national standard is infeasible, since pollution problems differ greatly by area.<sup>9</sup> It would be a tremendous challenge, and perhaps beyond the capabilities of government planners, to determine the right numbers everywhere on an ongoing basis, especially given the accelerating pace of China's economic development and the ever-increasing industrial complexity that entails; data from only a few years previous might have already grown stale for the purposes of emissions control. On the one hand, if planners do not set appropriately high standards for emissions levels, air pollution from a growing number of emitters might cause pollution levels to continue their climb. On the other hand, if the emission targets are overly aggressive, then a real danger of suffocating economic growth through reductions in industrial output could present itself. Since China

requires very high economic growth rates simply to accommodate new entrants into their labor force and content the populace with continued one-party rule, government planners would almost certainly err strongly on the side of over-conservatism in implementation of this anti-pollution policy, thus producing insufficient reductions in coal-related emissions and prolonging China's air pollution problem.

## SUBVERSION.

How might subversion jeopardize achievement of pollution reduction targets via standards mandated by the national government?

Ensuring compliance with mandated standards would be a task that increases with China's economic growth and multiplies in complexity alongside its industrial base. Every industrial site within the scope of the pollution mandates would be subject to an endless cycle of intrusive inspections from national environmental agency personnel. Each inspection potentially threatens the financial well-being of local businessmen, workers, and officials, who all have a pecuniary interest in perpetuating environmental regulatory *laissez-faire*. Since corruption is already endemic at the local level, an extensive national investigative force, with no investments at stake and less opportunity to establish symbiotic bribery relationships with industrial representatives than local officials, would be required to police infractions of the pollution standards and enforce punishment of violators.

## FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

### EXPENDITURE.

What level of government expenditure would be required to institute and manage

**CURRENTLY, LESS THAN 10% OF STEAM COAL IN CHINA IS WASHED. INDUSTRIAL BOILERS AND FURNANCES USE HALF OF THE COAL BURNED IN CHINA AND ARE THE GREATEST SINGLE CONTRIBUTOR TO URBAN AIR POLLUTION.**

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a tax and subsidy incentives policy to combat China's coal-related air pollution?

Though coal produces the most pollutants of any fossil fuel when burned, there now exist technologies and practices which can mitigate many of the worst effects of coal use. Were China to begin widespread "washing" of low-grade high sulfur coal and installation of cleaner-burning equipment, emissions would be greatly reduced. Currently, less than 10% of steam coal in China is washed. Industrial boilers and furnaces use half of the coal burned in China and are the greatest single contributor to urban air pollution.<sup>10</sup> Extensive subsidies encouraging Chinese industry to make these modifications in their processes voluntarily, though intellectually appealing, would constitute an effective out-of-pocket expenditure by the government; given that the overwhelming majority of China's energy needs are met by coal burning, the total cost of such a subsidy across a rapidly industrializing continent-sized country like China would be staggering.

Subsidizing coal usage, aside from short-term considerations of costs and expenditures might also generate a long-term pitfall. The government's program, by strongly encouraging upgrades to existing coal-based technology, could unintentionally ensure that coal remains the first choice for any energy supplier, thereby artificially prolonging China's reliance on the very substance responsible for its pollution problems and subsidy expenditures in the first place. Though China may wish to employ coal for the time being, it serves no good purpose to bind itself to coal-based energy on a semi-permanent basis.

IMPLEMENTATION.

What difficulties would arise with the implementation of tax and subsidy incentives to reduce pollution levels?

Carrots alone are not effective, and must be paired with equally motivating sticks. The establishment of positive market incentives in the form of subsidies would necessitate matching corrective taxes to take into account the real costs borne by Chinese society at large from unimproved coal-burning. "The most important policy to encourage efficient energy development is to ensure that energy prices... begin to reflect environmental damage through taxes."<sup>11</sup> Such taxes would inevitably drive the cost of coal upwards, further encouraging conservation. However, while this rise in the price of coal would put pressure on industry, it would create a proportionally greater hardship for individuals. Ordinary people, although themselves responsible for significant contributions to urban pollution, are substantially less able to absorb price changes than corporations. Those most affected by this policy would likely be the urban poor; the real cost of coal in

Beijing is estimated to be 100% higher than the street price.<sup>12</sup> Such people cannot change rapidly to other forms of energy in response to price hikes, further ensuring they would be hit disproportionately hard. While this policy would reduce pollution, it has the potential to create an unintended jump in the cost of living.

Government planners would encounter a host of problems in establishing reduction targets. Once again, the economic dangers of overly ambitious reduction targets would tend to encourage overly cautious use of these policy tools. Moreover, because such programs depend partly on the decisions made by non-governmental groups, future expenditures would be available as imprecise estimates only; there could be no truly precise planning. Nor could the amount of pollution reduction be precisely fixed in advance. Indeed, depending on the Chinese public's ability to absorb price increases, it might even be impossible to meet the necessary predetermined targets for pollution.

SUBVERSION.

How might subversion jeopardize achievement of pollution reduction targets through tax and subsidy incentives?

An anti-pollution financial incentives program, by the very nature of subsidy programs, would surely spawn its widespread abuse if unchecked. Ensuring the subsidies are used only for their intended purpose, rather than for lining the pockets of the corrupt and well-connected, would require substantial oversight. Thanks to widespread corruption at the local level, such oversight would have to be based at the national level, even though that would be tremendously more inconvenient and expensive than if the program were largely implemented regionally.

Similarly, it can be easily anticipated that both tax avoidance and black market activity would naturally increase following the establishment of an incentive program, as people seek to evade the sanctions on the burning of unwashed coal in unimproved furnaces. Ferreting out such illegal activity would, again, require a large number of national enforcement personnel.

CONCLUSION

China's coal-related air pollution problems are so extensive that it must act; the consequences of doing nothing are too high to afford. If China chooses to battle the pollution through the imposition of mandated standards, it ends up locked into an unending search for noncompliance. Very large forces at the national level would be required to monitor industrial sites, and to thwart local officials solely concerned with the profitability of local industry. Setting prudent levels for emission standards could prove immensely, if not impossibly, difficult in the absence of strong market feedback for policy effects.

On the other hand, if China chooses to battle air pollution through the imposition of tax and subsidy incentives, it is forced to pledge its economy fully to the effort, and tie itself to the use of coal in a way that will be difficult to undo in the future. Pollution reduction cannot be forecast absent experience implementing such a program, and the ability of ordinary Chinese individuals to meet daily living expenses may be jeopardized.

On balance, though, it seems that a market-based approach would offer significant advantages. Almost certainly there would be less risk of throttling the economy, since market feedback would



be available to guide policy fine-tuning. Moreover, much-needed resources would be directed towards improving infrastructure, and not lost in enforcement efforts serving no useful secondary purpose. Because subsidy, the primary policy tool, would be positive and attractive, the incentive for illegal coal burning would be reduced. For good or ill, China will remain committed to making use of its native energy sources; the country has such scarce natural resources that its dependence on coal would not be changed by using other domestic energy sources.<sup>13</sup> Nudging China's industrial base through inducements to employ its chief energy resource in a more efficient and environmentally sound way would manifestly improve environmental conditions, arguably without jeopardizing economic growth.

5. Benewick and Donald, *State of China Atlas*, 84.
6. Johnson, Liu, and Newfarmer, *Clear Water, Blue Skies*, 2.
7. McElroy, Nielsen, and Lyndon, *Energizing China*, 379.
8. Johnson, Liu, and Newfarmer, *Clear Water, Blue Skies*, 50.
9. Benewick and Donald, *State of China Atlas*, 37, 85.
10. Johnson, Liu, and Newfarmer, *Clear Water, Blue Skies*, 46, 50.
11. *Ibid*, 53.
12. *Ibid*, 3.
13. *Ibid*, 48.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Michael B. McElroy, Chris P. Nielsen, and Peter Lyndon, eds. *Energizing China: Reconciling Environmental Protection and Economic Growth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Committee on Environment, 1998), 379, 246.
2. Robert Benewick and Stephanie Donald, eds., *State of China Atlas* (London: Penguin Group, 1999), 36, 85.
3. Energy Information Administration. *China: Environmental Issues*. <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/chinaenv.html> (accessed April 25, 2007).
4. Todd M. Johnson, Feng Liu, and Richard Newfarmer, *Clear Water, Blue Skies: China's Environment in the New Century, China 2020* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1997), 2.

# LAST RESORTS:

## The Cost of Tourism in the Caribbean

by NICOLE CABRERA

### POET AND PLAYWRIGHT DEREK

Walcott wrote, in response to efforts to establish a luxurious spa resort in the sloping valley between St. Lucia's volcanic Pitons, "to sell any part of the Pitons is to sell the whole idea and body of the Pitons, to sell a metaphor, to make a buck off a shrine."<sup>1</sup> Here, Walcott echoes the guttural response of an individual emotionally, socially, and culturally beholden to the land; the rational response of an aware, angry, and yet ultimately uninvolved, citizen. To sell any part of the Pitons might be tantamount to violating religious law for financial gain, but the root sin, the far deadlier sin, is the global inequality that has produced the situation in which the St. Lucian government signs on to such a proposal. Tourism in the Caribbean at once results from and reinforces this inequality in an unsustainably destructive cycle that robs the region of its future by recreating its past of servitude and inferiority.

Although dated, Polly Pattullo's *Last Resorts: The Cost of Tourism in the Caribbean* is a thorough investigation of the Caribbean tourist industry that,

despite the decade and a half since its publication, remains a credible and demonstrative source today. In what emerges as an overly generous appraisal, Pattullo dissects the individual threads that comprise the tourist industry in an attempt to contextualize its effect on Caribbean society, economy, and environment. *Last Resorts* tracks each nation's unique tourism or ecotourism development plan within the larger framework of the Caribbean Community (Caricom) as well as in relation to the industry's multinational corporations. Ultimately, Pattullo sees hope in Caribbean tourism, a projection that seems surprisingly antithetical to her own detailed presentation of the evidence.

History is alive in modern day politics and economics in that so much of our current global order is predicated upon the imperial trajectories that established an unequal hierarchic division of power and control. As the bastard children of the Iberian Peninsula, the Caribbean is united by a virulent history of colonialism, plantations, and slavery. In *With Broadax and Firebrand: Destruction of the Brazilian*

*Atlantic Forest*, Warren Dean attempts to coalesce Brazil's colonial history with its twentieth-century ecological destruction. Motivated by the Pope's line of demarcation, the Portuguese crown "stumbled through half a continent, driven by greed and righteousness, unmoved by pity or even curiosity" and eager to reap a profit from its colonial experiment.<sup>2</sup> From the very beginning, then, Portugal understood Brazil to be an exploitable source of wealth; an ethos that was quickly translated to untenured farmers and squatters who took what they could from the land before moving on. This mentality of shortsighted ecological destruction was ingrained within the Brazilian consciousness until independent Brazil had secured equality within the 'first world,' industrialized community.

Essential to understanding the Caribbean's current predicament is the residual power of its fundamentally different history. The people of the Caribbean were not simply subjugated by their colonizers as inferior; they were dehumanized and employed as slaves. As evidenced by Stuart McCook's



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*States of Nature*, the Caribbean's entire infrastructure was based upon agriculture and more tellingly, monocropping. Even upon independence, these economies were undiversified, propelling each nation into proportionally consuming and destructive attempts to 'catch-up' and 'play-ball' internationally. Given their small size and geographic isolation, the islands were not in the position to market their industrial prowess or, like Brazil, their ability to pollute. Instead, they commoditized, packaged and sold their aesthetic beauty, their white beaches and slowly cresting waves, their Pitons. Although it is vital to her argument, Pattullo only shallowly delves into the primary and facilitating condition for this reenactment of European colonialism: global inequality. The West's cultural conception of the Caribbean as solely a tourist destination, a playground, speaks to this inequality. One might vacation in Paris, but it is, at the same time, understood to be something more. Paris is a cultural, historical, and artistic hub unto itself; as a result, many choose to visit it. The Caribbean, however, is not considered much of anything unto itself; it only matters to the American or European in relation to himself, a place that exists for lazy travel. Like a tree that falls in a forest, if no American is there to experience it, did it even really happen?

Pattullo illustrates the pervasiveness of this sentiment by a deft incorporation of the language and concepts with which Westerners regard the Caribbean as well the host nations' own advertisement campaigns. The twin-island state of Antigua and Barbuda, for example, advertises, "With 365 powdery beaches (one for every day of the year), a wide variety of hotels and other accommodations, a fascinating history

and warm, friendly people, the island offers an exotic and unspoiled paradise."<sup>3</sup> In a single blurb, the islands first recall the potential Western traveler's visions of untouched, remote tropical beauty while simultaneously assuring him of luxurious, first world amenities. The centuries of colonial exploitation and subjugation is diametrically euphemized so as to assure that the 'warm, friendly people' hold no grudges against him for his ancestors' transgressions on this exotic, and unspoiled, paradise. Nancy Stepan argues that the palm tree eventually came to represent the tropics, "images of it instantly signaling less a botanical species than an imaginative submersion in hot places."<sup>4</sup> Like the palm tree, 'the Caribbean' meme, an undistinguished whole – for most tourists are unequipped to identify historical or cultural differences between the islands - triggers hedonistic images of indulgence. Pattullo argues that it is this culturally regenerated desire for the forbidden that explains the tourist-fueled gambling, sex, and drug trade (that at once attracts and scares off possible vacationers). It is this dichotomy of tourism, this presumed need and simultaneous disdain for the industry that triggered then-Cuban president Fidel Castro to rebut, "We don't want the image of a country of gambling, drugs, and prostitution: we want the image of a country with a high cultural level, a healthy country both morally and physically, an organized country that looks after the environment."<sup>5</sup>

To what extent, though, is tourism synonymous with environmental protection and sustainability? R.W. Butler's 'The Butler Model of Tourism's Life Cycle' traces the distinct stages of the industry. The first phase, according to Butler, is the 'exploration' of an untouched, natural locale. The stages of involvement,

## AN AMERICAN OR EUROPEAN TRAVELER WILL NOT RISK LIFE, LIMB, OR COMFORT TO VISIT A NATION SACKED BY POLITICAL INSTABILITY, CRIME OR THIRD-WORLD ACCOMMODATIONS.

development and consolidation follow as more hotels are constructed and mass tourism matures. But then, as a result of the mass tourism and overdevelopment, the super wealthy stop visiting and the 'product' stagnates and social and environmental destruction intensifies. Although Butler's model seems to be hell-bent towards extinction, the final decision between 'stagnation' (tourists leave and "what was poor and unspoiled is again poor but spoiled") and 'rejuvenation' (tourism continues until such a time as this dual-scenario reemerges) seems inevitable.<sup>6</sup> Caribbean tourism is so dangerous because it at once sustains and sows the seeds of destruction for these economies. Essentially, tourism in the Caribbean is predicated upon the tourist's expectations of natural beauty, unpopulated tranquility, and safety. The tourism industry has experienced the greatest growth and has brought the largest amount of revenue to these countries, but this economic windfall is unsustainable.

The creation of free trade blocks such as NAFTA and the EU has made it very difficult for Caribbean manufacturing and agricultural industries to remain

competitive.<sup>7</sup> As cash crops failed and oil prices fluctuated, the Caribbean community was increasingly forced into the tourism sector as a source of national growth (taxes on the industry are a major source of government revenue), and more directly, employment.<sup>8</sup> In a constant effort to make more, to create more jobs, to attract more visitors who might otherwise frequent a competing Caribbean nation, rampant overdevelopment has become the norm. Pattullo writes, "More often than not, the scramble for tourists has seen development determined by short-term fancy rather than a coordinated long term approach" with the obvious result of massive ecological destruction and social disenfranchisement.<sup>9</sup> Beaches have been transformed as coastlines recede due to increased construction. Construction runoff and cruise ship waste have transformed the once pristine sea into an oftentimes itchy, saline cesspool. Mangrove groves and corral reefs are alternately destroyed by anchors, construction, drainage, and waste, thereby forever reducing the ecological wonder of the region and severely limiting the possibilities of tourist attractions. Where once an individual might have hoped to watch a tranquil sunset on a quiet beach, there are only hotels on the horizon. Even the supposed ecotourism success story of Dominica elected to build roads to facilitate the tourist's accessibility to Trafalgar Falls thereby ruining the very 'natural' feel that they had purportedly been advertising; once the rainforests and beaches are besmirched to the point that they no longer fit with Northern conceptions of the Caribbean, there will nothing else to sell.<sup>10</sup>

*The beast has spiraled out of control.*  
At the same time the domestic population is increasingly marginalized. Efforts to

bring political stability and infrastructure are solely for the viability of the tourist industry. Entire populations are treated as potential global servants; consider St. Lucia's once required reading for elementary aged students entitled *Hello, Tourist!* Funded by American Airlines and American Express, *Hello, Tourist!* taught children how to respectfully interact with visitors so as to help their national economy.<sup>11</sup> An early 1980s Dominican public service poster read, "SMILE. You are a walking tourist attraction."<sup>12</sup> An American or European traveler will not risk life, limb, or comfort to visit a nation sacked by political instability, crime or third-world accommodations. Although the industry does employ thousands, it is unsecured employment without benefits or room for advancement. Peasant economies have been transformed into service sectors, but with minimal real improvement. Thousands are laid off each off-season. Given the constant supply of labor, workers cannot agitate for improved working conditions. Similarly, the private and hotel management sectors are dominated by white foreigners. Hotels import thousands of dollars of foreign food as opposed to buying locally. The preponderance of missing linkages severely reduces the industry's profits and thus the already small trickle down effect. As a result of this social alienation, crime inevitably increases thereby threatening the very lifeblood of the economy in what becomes a sad, ironic cycle of unsustainable development. Who benefits from what West Indies born writer V.S. Naipaul calls this 'new slavery?' Aside from foreign investors, the answer seems murky.

Airlines, travel agencies, and cruise lines are all in a disingenuous position of power relative to these sovereign nations. Unless governments court these corporations,



their entire economy might be upset by something as seemingly trivial as the permanent cancellation of non-stop flights to their island. Caribbean tourism is modern day settler colonialism. Here, wealthy foreigners find pleasure and financial gain at the expense of the local population. The local population, likewise, finds employment and profit only in their relative position of inferiority. At the same time, tourism is the new monocrop. In the past, the Caribbean depended upon bananas and sugar cane; today, the undiversified economy is tourism. Like bananas or sugar, an undiversified tourist economy is vulnerable. A hurricane, shooting, or US Travel Advisory might destroy the whole industry permanently. Jean Holder, of the Caribbean Tourism Organization argued that Caribbean is “forced to choose between an industry it ‘deep down’ does not really want, and the economic fruits of that industry which it needs and which, it seems more and more, only tourism will provide.”<sup>13</sup> What is perhaps most troubling about Pattullo’s analysis is that she so clearly did good and innovative research, but to little avail. She never addresses the fact that this predicament is a false choice. Instead, she rambles something about ‘new tourism’ and how that will fix everything.

Tourism might be the lifeblood of the Caribbean economy, but it is toxic. It is easy enough to argue that without it, thousands would be unemployed and the economy would spiral downward, leaving millions homeless, hungry, and without options. This, however, is a false reality. Tourism exists because of global inequality; it does not have to stay this way. Like exploitive agribusinesses in Central America that profit off the suffering of those who work for unsustainably low wages, tourism is offered as a false

choice. Perhaps by reducing or destroying the tourism industry, these nations would experience a period of social and economic decline but only then is there a chance for change. As long as the Caribbean continues to settle for this exploitive, unequal exchange, there can be no positive growth. Their people will remain poor, uneducated, and stuck. As tourism continues to overdevelop, their profits will begin to fall as their product becomes tainted and unmarketable: Come to the Bahamas where everyone is guaranteed half a beach chair and two fifteen-minute rotations in the ocean a day! Tourism merely treats the symptoms of global inequality, not the root illness. This is the reality of Caribbean tourism: in an attempt to secure their immediate future, these nations are sowing the seeds of their own destruction. Tourism must become a major regional industry that contributes to Caribbean economies without being their sole market for growth. The profits they accrue ought to be reinvested into the domestic sector in regards to education, health care, industry, and agriculture. Perhaps, rather than import goods, the Caribbean might instead create the necessary industries so as to fill these backward leakages; hotels could buy locally produced foodstuffs, linens, furniture and the like. By investing in the domestic and industrial sectors, these diversified economies will become increasingly sustainable. Although there is a Caribbean Development Bank, its relatively small equity cannot adequately facilitate investment. Perhaps if this were to change, then the Caribbean might be able to unite as a political and economic unit and develop educated, healthy societies with diversified economies and fruitful tourism industries. Consider, for instance, Cuba’s high rate of doctors and scientists. If this was imitated across the

Caribbean, then might not the region become a research hub or pharmaceutical outpost? Once governments are forced to look for solutions outside of tourism, the Caribbean’s future might be one of domestic and international equality.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. Polly Pattullo, *Last Resorts: The Cost of Tourism in the Caribbean*, New York: Cassell, 1996, p. 2.
2. Warren Dean, *With Broadax and Firebrand*, Berkeley: UC Press, 1995, p. 42.
3. Pattullo p. 107
4. Nancy Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001, p. 19.
5. Pattullo, p. 91.
6. Pattullo, p. 8.
7. Pattullo, p. 7.
8. Patullo, p. 33.
9. Pattullo, p. 35.
10. Patullo, p. 125.
11. Pattullo, p. 72.
12. Pattullo, p. 62.
13. Pattullo, p. 63.

# IMAGINED EXPERIENCES:

## Performance, Rhetoric, and Study Abroad

by LISA BRAVERMAN

### THIS PAPER ANALYZES

supervised college-level international experiences in the context of international communication and rhetoric. Most importantly, the project compares how such experiences – referred to hereafter as “study abroad” – are discussed versus how they are lived and performed. While I believe the popular rhetoric of study abroad at both the institutional and interpersonal levels supports the idea that international experiences simply “are” beneficial, such rhetoric is in curious contrast to dominant discourses surrounding international studies. Dominant ideas include theories suggesting interactions between and among citizens of separate nations are truly complex social constructions engineered by members of imagined communities; in contrast to the popular conception of study abroad, such ideas deconstruct and analyze cross-cultural communicative meaning as opposed to creating a universal message of benefit. Though this paper aims both to blend the theoretical and practical applications of study abroad as well as explore the

effects of international experiences upon American college students, its main goal is to theorize, in light of international communication, how study abroad narratives are created and interpreted.

In terms of international communication and rhetoric, understanding the relationship between (what I will refer to here as) discourses of social construction and universal benefit is critical to many kinds of intercultural communicative processes. If, as Benedict Anderson (2006) argues, nations themselves are imagined because their members construct kinship with many people they will never meet, the same theory might be applicable to phenomena other than nationalism – for example, studying abroad. By examining the performance of study abroad and comparing that data to rhetoric surrounding international experiences, I hope to illuminate and partially explain curious disparities between the ways supervised international experiences are discussed publicly versus how they are regarded privately.

The rhetoric of study abroad might indeed be emerging as a kind of master narrative of the four-year American college experience; while every student certainly does not do it, there seems to be a strong language of persuasion emerging that everyone should. Listening to study abroad being discussed in the college environment, one would be hard pressed to hear any negative comments regarding student experiences. On the contrary, dominant college narratives actively encourage all students to spend significant, supervised time overseas. By interviewing both students who have and have not studied abroad, I hope to amass useful data about potential impacts of study abroad on students’ worldviews. Such data – though there will be a small amount of it – could help to support or refute the idea that everyone who can, “should” study abroad. Research participants all define themselves as college seniors from the Midwest; <sup>1</sup> half the students studied abroad and the other half did not. Though distinct populations who come to study in the United States are all important, this study will chiefly focus on American students. I did find,



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however, that even the category "American students" is fluid – I talked to people with an incredibly wide range of experiences and backgrounds. For example, I spoke with a student who did not study abroad and grew up in Indiana – part-way through the interview, she told me she had been internationally adopted and did not fully consider herself "American." Instead of discounting students' experiences that did not fit neatly into the study I had constructed, I took all students' experiences as a chance to refine how I understand study abroad.

### STUDY ABROAD AMONG AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS: AN OVERVIEW

According to Burn (2000), approximately 114,000 U.S. students are studying overseas annually. To the best of my knowledge, that figure accounts for semester, summer, and full-year students. Although international exchanges are lauded as "something everyone should do," by graduation, less than 3% of American college students have studied abroad (Collins and Davidson 2002). In terms of student demographics at the end of the twentieth century, over 80% of those who study abroad are Caucasian; individual minorities each make up 4% or less of the study abroad population (Smiles 2001). Of late, a shift has been taking place that is moving overseas study destinations from Europe to South America and Asia (Tonkin 2001). Thus far, I have not come across a clearly presented explanation for this phenomenon.

While some of the concepts discussed in this paper might be applicable to students of nationalities other than American who also choose to study abroad, I will be discussing study abroad only in the context of American college students. There are

no motives behind this choice aside from my fear that interviewing students of all nationalities would create more variables than viable results.

### NARRATIVE: A HYBRIDIZATION OF PERFORMANCE AND RHETORIC

Although the communicative concepts of performance and rhetoric might join together in a multitude of forms and functions, I am most interested in oneway the two concepts interact – the narrative. In their most basic terms, I will equate narratives to stories. Stories, according to Turner and Bruner (1986), are both units of experience and socially constructed units of meaning. Since units of experience themselves are not inherently interesting but are "made" to be so (Andrews 1973), acts of narration are critical in culture/community formation. Michel de Certeau, quoting Pierre Janet, goes so far as to say "narration created humanity" (Janet in de Certeau 1984, 115). Additionally, de Certeau (1984) argues narrative structures are all spatial in nature and every story is, in fact, a travel story. The idea of stories as naturally spatial carries a variety of implications for the formation of national and international communities -- namely that "bodies in movement" immediately organize the world into "here" and "abroad," "familiarity" and "foreignness" (de Certeau 1984, 130). Most clearly, de Certeau describes culture as a "spatial metalanguage" (116). While deeply theoretical, de Certeau's work has a striking practical implication – it directly connects rhetorical language to the formation of spatial cultures (or rather, Anderson's concept of the nation). Several theorists delve into the ways in which narrative also connects to performance. Performance, in addition to embodying

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many social constructions, creates and shapes narratives. Hymes (1975) suggests the narrator and interpreter – consequently, the same language used to describe rhetoric – have two performative styles that are necessarily interwoven.

Through this essential interaction between narrator and message recipient, the work of creating master narratives is perpetuated. Syed Islam (1996) argues stories of departure and arrival set up an “in-between,” or liminal, state (5). Establishing a formal relationship between narrative, liminality, and performance, Bhabha (1990) posits cultural discourse is defined by an ambiguity/liminality that arises from tensions between narration and performance. The liminality Bhabha references can serve as a catalyst for rhetorical discourse and attitude change, often manifesting itself as a master narrative related to discourses of rites of passage.

Transformation is implicit in rites of passage.<sup>2</sup> When discussing performance, Bauman and Briggs (1990) -- much like Victor Turner -- link its acts to the “transformative.” The authors note both

performance and transformation possess three of the same key elements: framing, form, and function (Bauman and Briggs 1990). Operating under de Certeau’s assumption that every narrative is a travel story, it is useful to study the rhetorical and performative tools employed when constructing narratives and master narratives. Islam (1996) asks the relevant question of how we know a traveler (used here interchangeably with “narrator”) has crossed some sort of threshold – to respond to his own query, he argues the traveler announces and/or signifies his or her journey. Thus, the power of the narrative is established – without it, societies would be unable to create tales of their own mass transformations. Influencing group behavior is easier, presumably, when one has a strong narrative backing.

Since ritual transformations are communicated daily (and with heady implications), it will be helpful to briefly discuss the relationship between ritual narratives, performance, and rhetoric. First and foremost, ritual and rite of passage communication help to “[collectively transform] the cultural economy” (de Certeau 1984, xiv), establishing their importance in national and international narrative formation. Turner (1995) notes that symbolism is frequently used to articulate mass meanings of ritualized processes; similarly, Schieffelin (1985) connects rituals and symbols, arguing that both help to “make sense” (707) of culture and its problematic aspects. In terms of rhetoric, ritualized processes become authoritative by being placed in narrative structures (Hymes 1975). To merge performance and rhetoric, ritual language and other forms of ritualized communication are not effective because they necessarily

convey any “useful” information; they (ritualized forms of communication) instead “establish an order of actions and relationships between the participants through restricting and prescribing [forms] of speaking” (Schieffelin 1985, 709). Hence, power is implicit in narrative, much in the same way it is implicit in performance and persuasion. The formation of metanarratives, for example, dictates entire national attitudes – or at least the attitudes of power-wielding governments.<sup>3</sup>

When combined, elements of performance, national constructions, rhetoric, and narrative provide powerful commentary on the socially constructed “international environment.” As Bhabha states, national consciousness might currently be giving way to a kind of “international dimension” (1990, 4). In a manner that reinforces Anderson, de Certeau says cultures -- and I would assume international cultures as well --are created when “the ordinary [person] *becomes* the narrator ... [and] defines the (common) place of discourse...” (1984, 5, italics in the original). Personal narratives often become public, and can be labeled as counter-narratives. While an international community emerging from a community of distinct, imagined nation-states might not be considered a full-fledged counter-narrative, it certainly harbors several boundary-breaking characteristics of the counter-narrative. For example, “internationalizing” forces disturb the individual identities that create imagined communities (Bhabha 1990) – the state becomes less important in an increasingly multinational, multicultural environment. In terms of a rapidly globalizing international climate, the image of the nation itself is in a liminal state (Ibid); even terms such as “cross-cultural” come



into question because they presume the very naturalness of those cultural boundaries (Islam 1996, 4). International rhetoric appears to be shifting – what is being performed, what messages are being conveyed, and how these actions and discussions are in constant flux. An examination of the ways in which “international education” is constructed is essential to an understanding of the direction in which global communication is heading.

## A WORLD OF BENEFITS? THE CRUX OF THE EXCHANGE

*“I found myself in some small villages in Mali with no running water, no electricity, no navigable roads, and if you took a picture of where I was and where I’m sitting right now, they couldn’t be more different. I couldn’t have been – lived – in two different, two more different areas of the world, and yet... every woman I was meeting was like my own mother.” (SA9, female)<sup>4</sup>*

Many scholars and study abroad information websites argue that tremendous personal and academic benefits abound for those who choose to study overseas. While studying abroad still seems to be – for the most part – reserved to students of fairly wealthy socioeconomic statuses, Falk and Kanach (2000) argue modern international exchanges are not reminiscent of the 19th-century European Grand Tour in that study abroad is not solely for the privileged elite. Citron and Kline (2001) argue that study abroad is, by nature, experiential – they go on to explain there are many perceived benefits of experiential learning.

For American college students who choose to study abroad, the ways in which their experiences positively shape them are seen as virtually limitless. Hadis (2005) explains benefits are observed among returnees

in the areas of: concerns regarding international affairs, appreciation of different cultures, maturation, self-awareness, and independence. Other lists of perceived benefits add the concepts of attitude shift, skills of observation and interaction, academic focusing, global and open-mindedness, the enriching experience of reverse culture shock, and international mobility (Jackson 2005; Hadis 2005). Academically, going overseas can serve as a “life-sized language lab” (Wilkinson 2000, 130) or as a place where “students learn learning has its own power” (Hadis 2005, 60). Benefits extend beyond the global environment and college classroom, however, to reflect back upon the American home culture. In addition to the benefits described above, Sussman (2002) explains students can have more of an appreciation of their own culture(s) and even improve relationships with their parents. Woolf (2001) echoes this sentiment by claiming students who study abroad are forced to re-perceive the United States, and such an experience is fundamental to personal growth. The entire concept of “personal growth,” however, is extremely abstract; perhaps it can best be understood by deconstructing what actually happens when American college students study abroad.

International education is intriguing for many reasons, but perhaps most intriguing is the way in which students are forced to live and confront their own “otherness.” The students I talked to often mentioned how interesting it was for them to be an American and a national minority at the same time – occasionally, they also mentioned racial, religious, and class differences between themselves and members of their host communities. This phenomenon is often referred to as the “student as stranger” or “student as

outsider” phenomenon (Hartung 2002, 29), and it appears to have consequences even more profound than the ones described above. Rhetoric surrounding international experiences relies heavily on describing how the experiences are performed, so I will make a brief return to the performative. Citing Goffman’s theory of performance, McNamee and Faulkner (2001) argue studying abroad unwittingly prompts a flawed, or vulnerable, presentation of the self and subsequent embarrassment. By becoming an “other” and doubtlessly encountering performative awkwardness, students who study abroad often experience a “breach in conventional assumptions of meaning” (McNamee and Faulkner 2001, 66). Seeing as the social construction of meaning is an integral part of daily life no matter what culture one is a part of, the disruption of such constructions can be traumatic and cause students to re-ascribe all kinds of social meanings (McNamee and Faulkner 2001). McNamee and Faulkner directly link this meaning disruption to study abroad benefits, saying that “too little meaning disruption is likely to result in little or no personal or professional growth” (2001, 76). With this last statement, the line between a description of an exchange and the perceived benefits of that exchange becomes blurry. Once that line is blurred, an overpowering rhetoric of benefit takes over.

My point is not that study abroad is detrimental (or even not beneficial) in any way, but rather that we should scrutinize the rhetoric surrounding it before we accept it (just as we would with any other rhetoric). Study abroad advisory websites and articles in higher education journals frequently paint rosy pictures of overseas experiences without mentioning any potential drawbacks – let alone trying to

## PARTICIPANTS SAID THEY FOUND THAT THEY WERE MORE OPEN, OUTGOING, AWARE, AND CRITICAL OF PATRIOTIC DISCOURSES THAN THEIR FRIENDS WHO HAD NOT STUDIED ABROAD.<sup>6</sup>

present a balanced, cohesive argument in favor of international exchange. Keeping with Halualani's (2008) statement that "intercultural contact [is] idealized and optimal" (2), McMillan and Opem (2004) -- as well as Dwyer and Peters (2004) -- enumerate the countless benefits of study abroad on two popular websites, "Abroad View" and "Transitions Abroad." On the former site, McMillan and Opem state that study abroad will "likely affect the rest of your life," "ignite your education," and "launch your career" ([http://www.abroadviewmagazine.com/archives/spring\\_04/study.html](http://www.abroadviewmagazine.com/archives/spring_04/study.html)). In addition to the above perks, the authors claim studying abroad can help one "[foster] personal growth and development" and "make life-long friends." Finally, after describing international exchanges in light of the above-mentioned benefits, the authors end their article with this final subject heading: "How will you change the world?" (Ibid). While each advantage the writers describe might very well be an actual gain experienced by study abroad students, I find it a little disturbing that study abroad – a potentially painful experience in many regards – is portrayed in such a uniformly positive light. What is more disturbing,

however, is that the rhetoric of benefit surrounding study abroad's discussion in public spheres (rhetoric formed by opinion and presented for persuasive purposes) is not simply presented as fact, but accepted as fact.

While reading McMillan and Opem's (2004) article, I found an exceptionally bizarre statistic. The statistic reads (and it is repeated in Dwyer and Peters' (2004) article): "82% of [study abroad] alumni say they developed a more sophisticated way of looking at the world" ([http://www.transitionsabroad.com/publications/magazine/0403/benefits\\_study\\_abroad.shtml](http://www.transitionsabroad.com/publications/magazine/0403/benefits_study_abroad.shtml)). To me, there are several important things wrong with looking at such a statement as credible research. For one thing, how were students asked this question about looking at the world in a more "sophisticated" way? Even if the students' study abroad experiences did them great harm, they would be hard pressed to answer "no" if asked something along the lines of, "Did your thinking about the world advance since your last experience?" Moreover, the term "sophisticated" is, to my knowledge, not explicitly defined. Nothing about a question regarding sophistication is particular to study abroad experiences. If someone were to ask me if I had a more sophisticated way of looking at the world after studying abroad, I would say yes; if they asked me the same question after my freshman year of college, I would say yes; if they asked the same question after I crossed the street and nearly got hit by a car, the answer would be, again, yes.

Inappropriate questions for study abroad outcomes assessments (like the one above) fit into the idea that the rhetoric of benefit surrounding international education is somehow charmed. Dwyer and Peters'

(2004) outcomes assessment, featured on the popular website [transitionsabroad.com](http://www.transitionsabroad.com), features an overwhelmingly positive survey taken by study abroad returnees. The large survey (3400 respondents) boasted such statistics as the following<sup>5</sup>: 96% of alumni had increased self-confidence, 97% said study abroad served as a catalyst for increased maturity, and 95% said study abroad has had a lasting impact on their worldviews ([http://www.abroadviewmagazine.com/archives/spring\\_04/study.html](http://www.abroadviewmagazine.com/archives/spring_04/study.html)). To me, these impressive percentages could mean a couple of things; either almost everyone experiences the same blanket benefits from studying overseas, or the particular way in which the survey was worded made it difficult for a returnee to say s/he did not achieve a particular thing. Most likely, it is a combination of both things. Again, I am not trying to in any way negate the very real growth that takes place in study abroad contexts, but rather argue that even personal outcomes are being fashioned into social constructs.

## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

In order to get one additional picture of what truly happened to students when they went overseas, I held a focus group made up of four students whom I had interviewed previously. The focus group also served as a chance to further my understanding of the rhetoric surrounding study abroad. I asked the participants questions about their experiences and how their living overseas compared to the way they heard study abroad talked about around campus. All students talked about increased independence, surprise at what they could accomplish, and humorous learning experiences during their sojourns (e.g. the student who constantly had books taken out of his hands on Chinese public



transportation by interested commuters, or the student who was informed by her Italian roommates that she was responsible for paying part of the apartment renovations she had nothing to do with). Several students worked for the admissions office, the office of overseas study, or a business school mentoring program; all students I talked to said they were instructed to dispel “myths” about study abroad and make it appear as beneficial as possible in their given jobs. One participant said that in his work with the office of overseas study, he tried to convince students that going overseas was affordable and one could still graduate on time if s/he chooses to go. There was overwhelming agreement that the rhetoric surrounding study abroad was positive, but the experiences themselves were positive as well.

In addition to a rhetoric of benefit, students also discussed how study abroad was tinged with a rhetoric of commodification. One business student explained how she had heard countries other than the United States described as “emerging markets,” and spending time overseas would help a businessperson move more easily among such markets. Thus, in addition to being heralded socially, study abroad has become economically desirable. When talking about globalization, students who had studied abroad used similar language as the student who described emerging markets. The idea (articulated in both the focus group and interviews) that institutionally “internationalized” students can “move about more easily” in a “rapidly globalizing world” quietly invokes both materials – what one uses to move about – and disparity. If certain students can move about more easily, they are both operating more efficiently than they were before and more efficiently than other communities they imagine.

Although it was not overwhelming, several focus group participants mentioned ways in which they were different than people who had not studied abroad. In all of those cases, discussions at least began with the assumption that study abroad students’ qualities were more desirable. For example, participants said they found that they were more open, outgoing, aware, and critical of patriotic discourses than their friends who had not studied abroad.<sup>6</sup> The mood and topics of the focus group discussion were friendly, and everyone had pleasant things to say about their experiences. Because everyone was so positive, I believe they might have helped each other idealize their trips; on the other hand, maybe all their trips were uniformly beneficial.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is far easier to analyze study abroad’s rhetoric as opposed to its performance. While I can ask students how they have heard study abroad discussed and read pamphlets and websites, I cannot fully see how even my closest friends’ sojourns were performed. In lieu of analyzing study abroad’s actualized performance, I instead analyzed the rhetoric of its performance – its narratives. Study abroad experiences themselves are real, but the narratives which surround them are much more elaborate social constructs. I was unable to prove that going abroad simply “is” beneficial – after talking to college seniors, I realize such a statement is too general to apply to even a small sample size. The more interesting question, perhaps, is why study abroad is held to a different standard of scrutiny than other experiences.

The construction of study abroad narratives is as complicated as the life experiences of those who choose whether

or not to go overseas. Performances of study abroad do not just happen overseas – they happen when students return home. After reflection and possibly idealization, many returnees’ stories take on rhetorical qualities that implicitly persuade others to make similar journeys. Many students who study abroad experience marked personal and academic transformations, namely becoming more likely to embrace cultural relativism. Discourses surrounding study abroad do not simply market international experiences as ways to become more interculturally sensitive, however – they market study abroad as a way to attain all kinds of abstract goals. When it comes to proving that students actually achieve all they set out to accomplish, the research becomes muddled. If I were to continue with this project, I would find it worthwhile to interview freshmen about how they perceive study abroad, later returning to the same group as seniors.

While the statement “going abroad is beneficial” might not be true for everyone, the statement “going abroad is transformative” has a more truthful ring. It might well be impossible to come back as the exact same person one was at departure. The flip side of this coin, however, is that many other experiences college students encounter can have similar, unwittingly transformational effects on their lives. The real – and sometimes detrimental – work of social constructions happens when people select which experiences to value and which to devalue. I do not believe I can change what is valued and what is not in American popular culture, but I argue it is our responsibility to pay attention to what is romanticized and what is ostracized. Currently, the rhetoric surrounding study abroad can lead one to believe intellectual enlightenment is for the few who are

able to go overseas. If this statement rings true, however, it is almost comical and deeply ironic – the “intellectually enlightened” have clearly constructed their enlightenments, and they cannot see their own shortsightedness.

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4. Interviewees will be referred to with the letters “SA” (studied abroad) or “NS” (did not study abroad).
5. Percentages given are averages among students who studied abroad for the full academic year, Fall, Spring, and/or Summer terms
6. The quote from SA5 about patriotism mentioned earlier in the paper was taken from the focus group.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Some interviewees were fourth-year seniors, others were fifth-year students.
2. For more on rites of passage and ritual transformation, see the works of Victor Turner (cited in the bibliography).
3. Specific examples of the power of the metanarrative are multitudinous in the world of political communication. They can be especially visible in countries engaged in territorial disputes – consider the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Stories of “who owns what” fuel wars. As Anderson notes in *Imagined Communities*, people are willing to die for their imagined communions; communions that are created by narratives.

# TURKISH POLITICAL ISLAM AND ITS LIMITATIONS:

## The AKP and the United States

*I asked Erdogan if Islam and modernity were compatible. "Islam is a religion," he said, "It is not an ideology. For a Muslim, there is no such thing as to be against modernity. Why should a Muslim not be a modern person? I, as a Muslim, fulfill all the requirements of my religion and I live in a democratic, social state. Can there be difficulties? Yes. But they will be resolved at the end of a maturity period so long as there is mutual trust."<sup>1</sup>*

by SAM PHILIPSEK

### THE ABOVE WORDS COME

from a recent interview between *New York Times* columnist, Roger Cohen, and the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Far from being empty rhetoric, they underscore Turkey's unique position as being a moderately free democracy ruled by a party with roots in political Islam. They offer hope for those in the West—particularly Bush Doctrine loyalists—that democracy in the Middle East can exist along side Islam. But at the same time they represent the distinctness of Turkey from the rest of the region, and the seemingly peculiar position of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) as both a trumpeter of Islamic values and a protector of democratic freedoms—a role that differentiates it from much of the rest of the Muslim world. More than anything, they rebuff the theory that Islam is incompatible with democracy, while demonstrating the limits of using Turkey as a democratic model for the Middle East.

Understanding the rise to power of a political Islamist party in a historically fiercely secular Turkey is important for

assessing both the cohesion of Islam and democracy as well as democratic movements in the Muslim world. It remains to be seen whether the election of the AKP has ushered in a new era of religiously-oriented rule in Turkey, and if this new shift will dramatically alter relations with the U.S., Israel, and the Middle East. It is certain, however, that the rise of the AKP presents both challenges and opportunities for the U.S., both in terms of using Turkey as a strategic foothold for America in the region and in terms of exploring necessary conditions for democracy promotion. Turkey's case is a unique one, and the information that can be gleaned from it is limited by the country's history, state interests, and aloofness from the rest of the Middle East.

### INTRODUCTION

The significance of Turkey to the West manifests itself in several ways—its allegiance to both Asia and Europe, its energy connections in the Balkans, and its long tenure in the North Atlantic Treaty

Organization. In the last decade, a new avenue of importance has opened up with the election and subsequent reelection of the AKP, a party with strong ties Islam, to power. This has occurred in spite of Turkey's strict adherence to secularism, maintained by the powerful institution of the military and a devotion to the legacy of the modern republic's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Political Islam's new and influential role in Turkey offers the U.S. a chance to make inroads to the Muslim hearts of the Middle East as well as an opportunity to learn from the coexistence of Islam and democracy.

The following pages examine the hypothesis that Turkey is an instructive example of liberal, Islamic democracy with which the United States should nurture a close relationship in order to advance its interests in the Middle East and promote democracy. In doing so, the limitations to Turkey's use as a model for the region become evident, as do the challenges posed by the ascendancy of the AKP. Sharp restrictions on discourse are necessitated by Turkey's own



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conception of Islam and the activist role of state institutions. Thus, it is paramount that modern Turkish history and the background of the AKP be explored to contextualize its political Islam and its potential for export. Defining the limits of Turkey's Islamic democracy is not the only aim of studying the AKP, for this undertaking also illuminates many advantages and disadvantages for U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. The long and friendly relationship between Washington and Ankara is both put into question by Turkey's growing Islamic tendencies, and is also potentially more valuable in terms of gaining a more influential partner in dealing with the Muslim world. The sum of the findings indicates not that Turkey is a perfect case study of the fusion of Islam and democracy, but rather that there is vast potential for both democratic and American gains.

## TURKEY'S PECULIAR PAST AND POLICIES

It may not at first appear strange that Turkey, a Middle Eastern country comprised mainly of Muslims, has both a prime minister and president from a party with avowedly Islamic leanings. But a closer look at the state and its secular history quickly reveals the struggle faced by the AKP in its rise to power. The instituted reforms of Ataturk strikingly explain both why it has taken Turkey so long to more fully embrace Islam at the highest levels of public office, as well as why Turkey has relatively recently moved in a more religious direction. To its credit, it can be said of the AKP that it has so far successfully navigated the blurred line between rigged secular state policies and the space created by such policies for growing Islamic sentiments.

The reforms of Ataturk took on many shapes and achieved predominance in multiple facets of Turkish existence. Indeed, one need not be in Turkey long before noticing that the likeness of the modern republic's founder is found virtually everywhere, and that the legacy of the storied leader is fondly remembered by all. Much can and has been written on the effects, both past and ongoing, of Kemalist reforms, but for the purpose of this paper, it is sufficient to recognize that they prevented religion from becoming an integral part of life. With the founding of modern Turkey in 1923, Ataturk "burned all bridges with Turkey's religious and imperial Ottoman past, shutting down religious orders, doing away with Islamic courts, religious instruction in schools, removing the caliphate, changing the Ottoman script, a mix of Arabic and Persian, to Latin letters, and rewriting criminal and civil law based on European legal codes."<sup>2</sup> But such an undertaking was hardly a simple matter, and involved far more than the cutting of ties with a vibrant and far-reaching Muslim past. Since "eradicating Islam altogether was not a realistic option," Turkey's modern founders

*tried to promote a "civilized" version of it. Instead of formally separating state and religion (as France did in 1905), modern Turkey monopolized religious functions and incorporated religious personnel into the state bureaucracy. To this day, the government-controlled Directorate of Religious Affairs supervises and regulates Islam throughout Turkey, appoints and pays the country's imams, and issues standardized sermons to be read out in thousands of mosques each Friday.<sup>3</sup>*

With Islamic activity dramatically curtailed, Turkish society necessarily took



on a religious form markedly different from other Muslim countries. But Islam was far from marginalized, rather it was reshaped by the state and forced to enter different levels of society. Writing for *Foreign Affairs*, Ömer Taspinar notes that “ironically, the ‘secular’ Turkish republic turned out to be less tolerant toward its non-Muslim minorities than the ‘Islamic’ Ottoman Empire had been, partly because Turkishness was associated with being Muslim.”<sup>4</sup> Resulting from this nationalization of Islam and cooptation by the state is that “traditional religious orders and groups have internally modernised and developed into integral parts of the state elite.”<sup>5</sup> It should be noted, however, that these reforms did not completely reach all levels of Turkish society. Rather, it was “the military, the government bureaucracy, and the urban bourgeoisie who adapted most readily to Kemalism’s thorough westernization. Winning hearts and minds in the countryside would have required the use of traditional and religious symbols, but those were anathema to the Turkish republic’s founding fathers.”<sup>6</sup>

Despite recasting itself as a modern and institutionalized force, Islam was nonetheless weakened by these secular reforms and kept in check (and still is) by the powerful military. The effects of radical secularization were further compounded by an event that transpired just before the Atatürk’s revolution. Though never implemented, the Treaty of Sèvres of 1920 was a painful reminder of the fall of the Ottoman Empire, calling for territorial division of Turkey to Europe. The incident had an enormous effect on Turkey’s ruling elites, making them extremely suspicious of both internal and external threats to the state, such as political Islam.<sup>7</sup>

The strong commitment by both the state and military to insulate secular Turkishness underscores the difficulties faced by Islam in taking a more proactive position in society. Until recently, Islamic parties and policies had made virtually no inroads at the government level. So great has the struggle been for Muslim actors to a role in the state, that “analysts of political Islam in Turkey often cite the general subordination of religious to political authority in Ottoman and post-Ottoman Turkey as an argument against the potential for the emergence of a religious state in modern Turkey.”<sup>8</sup> Though a religious state is not on the horizon, political Islam has arrived in Turkey, despite Kemalism’s vice grip on Muslim activity. Authors Dietrich Jung and Wolfgang Picoli argue in their book, *Turkey at the Crossroads: Ottoman Legacies and the Greater Middle East*, that the “emergence of political Islam” is indicative of “the elusiveness of a project that is intended to modernise a country whilst holding on to a unitary and authoritarian concept of society.”<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, political Islam has arrived as a primary force in Turkish society, and its rise is a product of a variety of factors. Angel Rabasa and F. Stephen Larrabee argue that its emergence can be attributed to “the waning of the Kemalist legacy, a rediscovery of religious schools and social welfare institutions, and the process of democratization and the rise of a more openly religious middle class.”<sup>10</sup> In addition to benefiting from the declining influence of Atatürk’s reforms, political Islam also, in some ways, drew strength from Turkey’s rigid secular policies. Writing of the radical Kemalist state, Dietrich Jung and Wolfgang Picoli claim, “The ill-fated strategy of producing social cohesion by means of

an Islamic-Turkish synthesis not only spurred political Islam as an ideology for the counter-elite of Sunni-Turkish origin, but set an example for the articulation of economic and political conflicts in cultural terms.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, though Islamism was interpreted as an external threat, it is “deeply rooted in Republican history,” and, along with Kurdish challenges, its “escalation into severe domestic conflicts was a consequence of the uncompromising policies of the Turkish state elite.”<sup>12</sup> At the very least, that the AKP has managed to weather every attack thus far and rule largely unhindered demonstrates “that the Kemalist policy of social engineering has met its limits.”<sup>13</sup>

Echoing the sentiments of Jung and Picoli, Rabasa and Larrabee point out that, unlike in other parts of the Middle East, “the rise of political Islam in Turkey (or rather, the politics informed by Islam) has been largely a response to internal factors, particularly the democratization and socioeconomic transformation of Turkish society over the last several decades.”<sup>14</sup> Ironically, one internal factor that has contributed to the growing Islamization of politics is the staunch defender of secularism, the military. With its prominent role in the governance of Turkey, the military was instrumental in initiating many measures, including those that indirectly aided that which it was committed to marginalizing. The military helped to ensure a more depoliticized society and ban on leftist parties, allowing Islam to fill a vacuum. Furthermore, generals employed a “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” to fight leftists and “maintain the Kemalist ideal of society.”<sup>15</sup> As discussed below, the military has also contributed to sympathy and support for Islamist parties like the AKP. Analysts have claimed that “the rising power of

political Islam was a late outcome of the third attempt to restructure society under military rule.<sup>16</sup>

An external threat that greatly complemented internal moves by the state aiding political Islam's rise arose from the Cold War. These years "forced Turkey to enter the age of democracy," which meant that "Kemalist secularism and nationalism slowly lost their political relevance," while "political Islam joined forces with conservative anticommunist political parties."<sup>17</sup> Using Islam as a symbol of Turkishness in the face of communism effectively moved religion into the political arena. Jung and Picoli write that "in addition to the ideological value that conservative propaganda assigned to Islamic symbols and idioms in fighting communism and socialist competitors, the centre-right parties also used religion as an effective means of social organization and political mobilisation."<sup>18</sup> Thus, political Islam has been both a victim and a beneficiary of rigid secularization and the military's bold aspirations to combat all dissent.

Co-opted by the state since the beginning of the republic, Islam has also benefitted by adopting elements of Kemalism. Turkish scholar Serif Mardin suggests that Turkey has witnessed a "long-range convergence of Islam and nationalism."<sup>19</sup> "The ruling Islamist Justice and Development Party," in particular, "has managed to tap into rising popular nationalism by fusing it with Islam."<sup>20</sup> Since winning 34 percent of the vote in November 2002, the AKP has successfully been able to govern on its own, further consolidating its hold on power by taking 46.6 percent of the vote in July 2007. The nationalism from which the party has benefited has been demonstrated by none other than the party's leader and current prime minister, Recep Tayyip

Erdoğan. Writing of his fusion of Islam and nationalism, Mardin remarks that "his rise as a person with legitimate Islamic credentials was a consequence not only of the piety he had expressed since his school days, but, possibly, even more of his use of the nationalist, secular rhetoric of the Turkish Republic that attracted him an admiring public."<sup>21</sup>

Both of the AKP's founders, Erdoğan and current president, Abdullah Gül, rose from the ousted and more Islamic Welfare party, and have providentially seized non-Islamic themes to incorporate into their platform. A crucial component to the AKP's success was "facilitated by a new middle class."<sup>22</sup> This base was instrumental in supporting the AKP, since the party's conservative message was largely tailored to many of its interests. Taspinar describes the AKP's rise as such:

*Erdoğan, who understood that political liberalization would consolidate the AKP's power base, wisely placed the EU's guidelines for democratization at the top of the AKP's agenda. In so doing, he achieved two crucial objectives. First, he earned the support of Turkey's business community, liberal intellectuals, and pragmatic middle class. Second, and perhaps more important, he won political legitimacy in the eyes of the staunchly secularist military; the EU, after all, had been the ultimate prize in Atatürk's vision of a truly westernized Turkey.<sup>23</sup>*

Aside from adopting policies popular with all Turks, the AKP also benefited from "a bad economy, corruption in the incumbent government, and huge gains made among the urban, working-class poor and immigrants in the varos [poor villages]."<sup>24</sup> Also, support garnered from what has now been infamously-dubbed the "Midnight

Memorandum," in which the military issued a harsh warning about electing Gül to office in 2007, "facilitated the AKP's second successive electoral victory."<sup>25</sup>

This brief introduction to Turkey's Kemalist legacy, the ascendancy of Turkish political Islam, and the AKP's recent success should make clear that the Turkey is a unique case study for examining Islam and democracy. It is evident that the Kemalist state "has greatly influenced Turkish society, and hence, the nature of Islamic activism in it."<sup>26</sup> But one also cannot deny that political Islam has ultimately emerged at least partially victorious over Turkey's history of radical secularism. This unlikely victory makes for very limited extrapolation to the rest of the Muslim world, its glaringly different state structure and history, rendering its replication impossible throughout the Middle East.

Yet, as much as Turkey is an anomaly to either liberal democracy or Islam, it also presents certain opportunities to glean information about the reconciliation of the two. The remaining pages explore how Turkey's long-repressed politics inspired by Muslim thought have manifested themselves, as well as how they affect the position of the United States in the region. Despite the many limitations with regard to the exportable nature of the Turkish experience, there is still ample opportunity for the U.S. to use Turkey's unique position as a bridge to the Middle East. In addition to revealing that neither Islam nor democracy exists in a vacuum, further exploration of the AKP demonstrates that precisely because of its strange position between the West and Islam, it is a possible strategic gem.



## LIMITATIONS TO THE TURKISH MODEL OF POLITICAL ISLAM

Daunting as it has been for the military and old secular establishment, Turkey's slow transformation into a democracy ruled openly by Muslims has been viewed with encouragement by many outside actors. Turkey's present condition is eagerly watched to see if Islam and democracy can coexist in the Middle East, or if more freedom means the rise of illiberal Islamist parties. Recent developments have seemed positive. "In a 2004 speech in Istanbul, President Bush praised Turkey as a model for the Muslim world and welcomed it as a partner in promoting democracy and good governance through the U.S.-conceived Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative." But by the same token, Stephen J. Flanagan and Samuel J. Brannen write that "many devout Turks were uneasy about being anointed by the United States as the counterweight to extremist Islam."<sup>27</sup> This seemingly contradictory relationship—Islamist governance over a population reluctant to embrace religious politics—underscores the uniqueness of the Turkish system. Turkey's apparent success raises some questions about the practicality of using the country as such a model. The Kemalist history of modern Turkey is demonstrated by the checked and nationalized brand of Islam that exists today, and institutions and attitudes peculiar to the country have created a system unlike any other.

Writing for Foreign Affairs, Graham Fuller remarks that "the true test of any Islamist party comes when it gains office by the ballot box and must then adhere while in power to the democratic norms it touted in opposition."<sup>28</sup> Turkey, it seems, goes

beyond mere adherence to liberalness, but, in fact, defensively promote a radically subtle brand of Islamic-inspired rule.

Rabasa and Larrabee succinctly describe Turkey's modest Islamic condition as follows: "Turkey's 'recessed' Islamic politics—with religion as an implicit rather than explicit part of political discourse—is one source of Turkish distinctiveness."

They go on to cite the constitution's "firm limits on expressions of political Islam" as one reason for this distinctiveness, which continues to weigh heavily on the minds of Islamist actors in Turkish society.

<sup>29</sup> Narrowly avoiding being banned as a party last summer by the Constitutional Court, "it is even less likely that the AKP will attempt to change the constitution."<sup>30</sup> The Constitutional Court has been active in challenging the dominance of the AKP, attempting to censure the party in June of 2005, and trying to block the block the appointment of Gül to the presidency.<sup>31</sup>

Complimenting the court's activist stance in checking the Islamic tendencies of the AKP is the role of the military. Aliriza notes that "since the closure case, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has drawn perceptibly closer to the Turkish General Staff (TGS), the ultimate guardian of Turkish secularism."<sup>32</sup> Rabasa and Larrabee agree that "the Turkish military views itself as the ultimate guarantor of secularism, and has been reluctant to accept a further reduction of its political role at a time when it perceives growing internal and external threats to Turkey's security."<sup>33</sup> Fuller views the TGS positively, claiming, "The Turkish army and Jordanian monarchy have...contributed to the eventual moderation of their countries' Islamists by setting limits on the kind of behavior permitted."<sup>34</sup> But Taspinar sees potential problems arising from the military's watchful eye. He writes,

*The experience of the Arab world clearly shows that authoritarianism only fuels extremism; in the absence of democracy, mosques become the only outlet for dissent, and Islam the only voice of resistance against tyranny. If the Turkish military goes too far in trying to repress moderate Islam, it will risk spawning a more radical version.*<sup>35</sup>

Thus the military, like Turkey's long, Kemalist legacy, bares the mantle of both checking Islamist tendencies and threatening to further ignite them. Even more so than before, the military is presented with the tricky task of moderating political Islam as it becomes more entrenched in Turkish society. The TGC has its work cut out for it, as the rise of the AKP has cleared the way for even more Muslim-oriented parties to enter the political arena, such as the more avowedly Islamic Contentment Party. A crackdown by the military could either protect Turkey's secularism, or, as in other countries where political Islam is forcefully suppressed, "encourage the emergence of secret, conspiratorial, and often armed groups rather than liberal ones."<sup>36</sup>

The double-edged sword of the Constitutional Court and military has undoubtedly shaped the AKP; its very existence as a functioning political party and not a clandestine and violent movement is evidence of a balance of freedom and restraint. The AKP, after all, was founded by two men from an Islamist party that proved too dangerous for the Kemalist establishment to allow, so Erdoğan and Gül are experienced in the ways of appeasing powerful secular stalwarts. Fuller reminds us that "co-optation through political participation is not a given, but rather depends on the existence of certain conditions in the

## POLITICAL ISLAM'S NEW AND INFLUENTIAL ROLE IN TURKEY OFFERS THE U.S. A CHANCE TO MAKE INROADS TO THE MUSLIM HEARTS OF THE MIDDLE EAST AS WELL AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN FROM THE COEXISTENCE OF ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY

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local political context.”<sup>37</sup> The military and courts make for a rigidly secular political context, and consequently, the nationalist-fueled AKP operates according to liberal norms. More concerned with taking a center-right position than a religious one, “the AKP defines itself not as an Islamic party but as a conservative democratic party similar to Christian democratic parties in Western Europe.”<sup>38</sup> And “while the AKP has Islamic roots, it enjoys broad-based political support that transcends religious, class, and regional differences.”<sup>39</sup>

The growth of an Islamist party that often keeps religion at arm’s length has not only been affected by the state, but from interactions with the West. With aspirations of joining the European Union, Turkish society would be reluctant to embrace an Islamist party that did not adhere to the human rights and political liberties required for E.U. membership. Indeed, “much of Turkey’s democratization over the last two decades has taken place

with the encouragement of the EU and Washington. Trying to find alternatives essentially means signing on to a marriage with illiberal non-democracies in the Middle East and Eurasia, where economic gains are seen as far more important than freedom of expression and political reform.”<sup>40</sup> But even without the E.U. carrot, Turkey, a longtime member of NATO, has been influenced by the West. Rabasa and Larrabee write that “Islamic politics in Turkey are affected to a greater extent by the international context than is generally the case elsewhere. In this sense, the Turkish case is distinct from most of the rest of the Middle East.”<sup>41</sup> This claim is manifested in even the ideological groundwork of Islamist politics, since “most Turkish Islamists intellectuals have been infiltrated by the Western philosophical discourse.”<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, “Turkey has had a long history of seeking to fuse Islam and Westernization,” which consequently “differentiates it from other Muslim countries in the Middle East and enhances the chances that it will be able to avoid the sharp dichotomies, ruptures, and violence that have characterized the process of political modernization in other Middle Eastern countries.”<sup>43</sup> The resulting effect has been “that in Turkey, Islamic activism has flourished in the crucible of democratization and economic liberalism, and has its base of support among those who favor globalization and Turkey’s integration into the European community. This is possible in Turkey because its Islamic identity is both culturally plural and ‘modern.’”<sup>44</sup>

This differentiation drawn between Turkey and other potential sites of an Islamic-democratic marriage underscores the dramatic effects that the military, constitution, and public attitudes have had on Turkey. Peaceful relations with

the West have also kept Turkey from veering off onto a radical path, which is demonstrated by the moderate rule of the AKP. Rabasa and Larrabee write, “Rigid Salafi interpretations of Islam have never taken root within a significant sector of the Turkish population, and public-opinion polls show that there is little support for an Islamic state. A large majority of Turks, including religious Turks, support the secular state.”<sup>45</sup> As a result of Turkey’s past, state structure, and public demeanor, what one can draw from Turkey’s case and apply to other Muslim states is limited. For in Turkey, “Islamic identity is rooted in economic progress. It is facilitated by educational opportunities and the growth of new media outlets. Islamic activism is open to modernity and is receptive to the influence of economic, social, and political expressions. Turkish Islam...is less rigid and ideological—in fact it is surprisingly divorced from the Islamist discourse of the rest of the Muslim world.”<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, one can easily see that the interventionist nature of the TGS is hardly democratic, is wrought with the potential to radicalize Islamists, and is hardly replicable. And a history of strict adherence to secular principles is also impossible to adopt or install.

There do exist, however, certain positive lessons to be observed from the success of the AKP. At the very least,

*the AKP is demonstrating that religious parties need not veer into fanaticism; it has succeeded with good governance, good economic policies, and the development of an Islamic governing philosophy that contains significant liberal elements. Polls show that Turks are becoming more religious and, at the same time, more opposed to extremist sharia laws.*<sup>47</sup>



Also, the AKP's more humane and peaceful relations cultivated with the country's Kurds gives credence to the observation that "these days nearly all Islamists push hard for democracy, believing that they will benefit from it and flourish within it. They also have discovered the importance of human rights."<sup>48</sup> But, as is discussed below, there are (some) reasons to fear that the AKP may tear Turkey away from its secularism. As Flanagan and Brannen point out, "Turkey is a democracy, and its leadership is susceptible to pressure from the electorate. There is undoubtedly a tipping point at which anti-Americanism among the Turkish public could influence Turkish policy."<sup>49</sup> Thus, Turkey's political predicament can neither be exported to the Middle East, nor is it absolutely certain whether what Turkey has should be desired. Cohen cautions that "Turkey is a laboratory of a moderate Muslim democracy; do not rush the experiment. It's easier to don a veil than remove it. Reversibility is not Islam's forte."<sup>50</sup>

## ISLAMIC TENDENCIES IN TURKEY

Turkish political Islam is dramatically different from radical Islamist movements in Palestine, Iran, or even Egypt, but a discussion of the Justice and Development party's brand of Islam is warranted. Fears by the military and more secular elites of Islamization under the AKP have been wildly overstated, but some striking changes and developments have taken place that threaten Turkey's long and rigid commitment to secularism. That the AKP was democratically elected necessarily indicates a wider, more popular enthusiasm with Islam. So strong has the backing been for the Islamist party that even the military, which is "perceptibly

uncomfortable with the AKP government as the political manifestations of increased religiosity challenging secularism, has been reluctant to directly confront a party with mass popular backing, as its unwillingness to follow up its 2007 memorandum against Gül's presidential candidacy clearly demonstrates."<sup>51</sup> Rabasa and Larrabee suggest that "the religious-secular divide in Turkish society reflects the redistribution of power from the traditional business establishment and its allies in the bureaucracy and in the military to" the religious entrepreneurial class.<sup>52</sup> The growing strength of more Islamic segments of society has been compounded by the fusion of Turkishness with Islam and Saudi money, both of which have "contributed to the Islamization of Turkish society."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, in keeping with the legacy of suspecting external threats, staunch secularists have often blamed the influx of capital from the Muslim world for Islamization. "Nongovernmental groups inside Saudi Arabia were also, albeit to a lesser extent than Iran, accused of funding Islamic fundamentalist movements that aimed at undermining Turkey's secular regime."<sup>54</sup>

Regardless of the sentiments that brought a party affiliated with Islam to power, there have been few signs that indicate a radical departure from Turkey's secular past. Confined as they are by the shackles of secularism, the AKP has still embodied some of the Islam on which its foundation is based. Simply looking at the party's founders, Erdoğan and Gül, reveals some cause for concern among secularists. As mayor of Istanbul, Erdoğan sustained substantial criticism for reciting an Islamic-inspired poem, and for clumsily referring to himself as a "servant of shari'a."<sup>55</sup> Erdoğan has also been accused of seeking to give Turksihness a more

Islamic tint, subscribing to the so-called Turkish-Islamic synthesis which is at the core of the National Vision that guides most of the AKP leaders."<sup>56</sup> Perhaps most worrisome about Erdoğan, though not necessarily because of religion, is that his regime appears intolerant to any criticism regarding creeping Islamization. "Editors and bureau chiefs of Turkey's most prestigious newspapers feel that they are under constant surveillance and threat of arrest without trial."<sup>57</sup> The president, too, has been the object of some worry; "one of the major secularist objections to Gül's presidential candidacy was that his wife wears a head scarf."<sup>58</sup>

Though the leaders, themselves, may be more Islamic than some Turks would prefer, the policies on religiously-themed issues produced by the AKP have been modest, even if strikingly different from the past. As explained by one scholar,

*the AKP's leaders prefer to promote reform by building a national consensus around [religious] issues rather than by challenging the secularist establishment head-on. Nevertheless, the secularists remain wary. They often point out Erdoğan's brief attempt to criminalize adultery in 2004, his appointment of religious conservatives to bureaucratic positions, or attempts by the AKP to persuade certain municipalities to discourage the sale of alcohol.<sup>59</sup>*

At an economic level, the AKP has been accused of both "trying to infiltrate Islamists into key positions in the Central Bank," and of allowing an "opaque influx of Islamist capital" into the economy.<sup>60</sup> And the AKP has long rallied to end what they perceive as discrimination, arguing that graduates of Imam Hatip religious schools should be able to enter non-religious

faculties in universities.<sup>61</sup> Also concerning higher education, the “AKP has never hidden its desire to lift the ban on wearing headscarves in universities.”<sup>62</sup> Even Turkey’s popular spirit, raki, is also feared by some to be targeted by the AKP. “Some traders believe raki and other drinks such as wine have been victims of high taxes imposed” by the AKP “in an attempt to curb alcohol consumption and promote Islamic values.”<sup>63</sup> Though the party has denied such accusations, they have been made several times by many people, and Rabasa and Larrabee claim that “AKP-run municipal councils are likely to continue efforts to infuse their conception of Islamic morality into public policy.”<sup>64</sup>

The AKP has not avoided criticism at the international level either for its religious leanings. “Israeli officials see Turkey’s Middle East diplomacy as a direct result of the AKP government’s Islamist identity.”<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, the AKP’s “theory and policy of ‘zero problems’ toward its neighbors” have been argued by some to be “propelled by a changing domestic political landscape more in touch with Turkey’s Islamic heritage and Middle Eastern bond.”<sup>66</sup> And “asserting that Mr. Rasmussen’s position during the cartoon crisis was ‘offensive to the Muslim world,’” Turkey blocked the Danish prime minister from becoming secretary general of NATO, prompting Soner Cagaptay to write, “The day has come that the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Ankara wears religion on its sleeve even in NATO.”<sup>67</sup>

As described earlier, the reasons for the AKP’s failure or refusal to implement more Muslim-driven reforms are many and complex. Cultural explanations aside, looking at the AKP in practice reveals that little has been done to merit serious alarm at either the domestic or international

level. Overblown alarms, claims one New York Times article, may have little to do with legitimate concerns over the party’s religion: “Secular concerns stem, in part, from a deep rooted class divide. Traditional, rural, religious Turks have long been an underclass.”<sup>68</sup> It remains to be seen whether the AKP will attempt further or more extreme measures, but with almost a decade of stable rule behind it, an argument can be made for a mostly successful fusion of democracy and Islamic actors. Of course, Turkey’s secular past and commitment to secularism, as well as the type of Islam practiced by the AKP are primarily responsible for this, and, at the very least, Turkey has proven that the mere introduction of Islam into governance need not destroy democratic efforts in the Middle East.

## TURKISH RELATIONS WITH THE MIDDLE EAST

As has been noted, much of the fear of Turkey’s Islamic-based rule, particular by the West, is concentrated in the realm of foreign policy. Faced with the enormous task of appeasing secular interests at home, the AKP is not a threat of exporting Islamism abroad. Yet, since the party’s rise, Turkey’s relationship with the Middle East has shifted focus. “Under the AKP.. Ankara has established close ties to Iran and Syria. It has also adopted more pro-Palestinian attitude in the Arab-Israeli conflict.”<sup>69</sup> But even if Turkey’s “zero problems” approach to the region is founded partially on religious ties, its positions still take into account rational state interests. The problem for the United States is that a more consolidated AKP has proven willing to embrace strategic goals that run counter to the interests of their longtime ally. Like the party itself, the foreign policy of the AKP is

only marginally rooted in Islam, but it has proven to be a break from the past in dramatic fashion. Understanding, tempering, and exploiting Turkey’s relations with the Middle East in the age of political Islam will certainly be vital to U.S. interests in the region.

Erdoğan has cultivated a foreign policy heavily influenced by the doctrine of “strategic depth,” which “suggests that Turkey should counter-balance its ties to the West by establishing multiple alliances, which would enhance its freedom of action and increase its leverage, both regionally and globally.”<sup>70</sup> And the result has been that “every Middle East actor—the Arab states, Iran, Israel, and the Kurds—recognizes the significance of Turkey’s renewed activism in the region.”<sup>71</sup> Seeking alternatives the U.S. and Europe, has, according to some, been brought on by the West. The situation has been assessed as follows:

*Although its origins preceded the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, Turkey’s regional rebalancing took on a new urgency with the heightened threat of the formation of an independent Kurdish state in Iraq bordering Turkey’s restive southeastern provinces. In pronounced fashion, Turkey has actively reasserted its strategic and economic influence in the region by building ties of cooperation and partnership where there was once antagonism and mistrust.*<sup>72</sup>

The invasion has also directly affected relations with Iraq, as “Turkish support is vital to Iraq’s long-term stability, development, and unity, and the Baghdad government has sought to reach out to Turkey along whatever channels Ankara has made available.”<sup>73</sup>



Two of Turkey's relatively recent relationships are with two actors far different from the U.S.: Iran and Syria. While "Damascus does not view Turkey as a close regional ally," writes Malka, "it increasingly trusts the AKP government and sees clear benefits and opportunities from strengthening cooperation."<sup>74</sup> It was, after all, "largely Turkey that reached out to Syria at a time when the United States and Europe sought to isolate the regime of Bashar al Assad."<sup>75</sup> More is said below of this newfound bond, which may play a role in Syrian-Israeli peace efforts.

With Iran, too, the AKP has embarked on a new diplomatic path. "Relations between Turkey and Iran improved since Turkey's Islamic-rooted governing party took power in 2002. Previous Turkish governments had accused Iran of trying to export radical Islam to secular Turkey, which hopes to join the European Union."<sup>76</sup> With regard to Iran, the AKP has largely sought to capitalize on energy potential. "From Turkey's perspective, good bilateral relations with Iran and regional stability are critically important, not for ideological reasons, but economic calculation. Iran is the largest supplier of natural gas to Turkey only after Russia."<sup>77</sup> And much to the chagrin of the U.S., Turkey is unlikely to back out its relationship with the Islamic republic, since according to Energy Minister Hilmi Guler, plans are underway to replace the country's existing Iranian pipeline with another.<sup>78</sup> From the Iranian side, Tehran has "worked to cooperate in limited areas with Turkey, hoping to neutralize Turkey from participating in any Western coalition against the Islamic republic."<sup>79</sup> As a result, "Turkey will be wary about implementing further U.S. or even international sanctions against Iran, particularly given its scarring experience with Iraqi sanctions

in the 1990s."<sup>80</sup> Ironically, some Turkish analysts have speculated that "Turkey and Iran were pushed together because the United States ignored Turkey's interests on the Kurdish issue."<sup>81</sup>

Even as the AKP steers Turkey toward Iran, it has not isolated itself completely. So fully has Turkey embraced a more interventionist position that now "Middle East states view Turkey as an attractive option over Iran or the U.S."<sup>82</sup> Perhaps more than anything, Turkey's desire to be a larger regional player is evidence not of Islamist ambitions, but of changing realities. Steven A. Cook writes, "Against the backdrop of the end of the Cold War, Turkey's tortured relationship with the European Union, and the security fallout from the invasion of Iraq, any Turkish government would likely pursue a foreign policy similar to that of AKP."<sup>83</sup> And as far as Iran and Syria are concerned, Cook notes that though "critics have often used these ties as clear indications of AKP's Islamist worldview, Ankara nurtured relations with Tehran and Damascus in the late 1990s (before Justice and Development even existed) and early 2000s."<sup>84</sup> Despite the non religious nature of much of Turkey's foreign policy, it does not change the fact that the AKP has taken an approach that may displease the U.S. With regard to Iraq, "Turkey's growing interests in the Middle East are likely to make Ankara wary about allowing the United States use its military facilities for Middle East and Persian Gulf contingencies except when such operations are clearly perceived to be in Turkey's interest."<sup>85</sup> Even with interests that differ slightly from Washington's, the AKP has yet to take a hostile stance toward its powerful and longtime ally, and even if it did, "it remains unclear how much influence Turkey actually possesses over a range of actors in

the region."<sup>86</sup> The U.S. may still be able to shape the foreign policy of the AKP in a manner beneficial to both parties.

## THE AKP AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

One critical facet of Turkey's Mideast policy exists in the highly controversial realm of the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Here, more so than in relations with Iran, at least rhetorically, the Islamic element of the AKP has shown itself. "As a Muslim state, Turkey served as a model for Israel's potential relations with other Muslim states and gave Israel an important degree of legitimacy."<sup>87</sup> But with the rise of the AKP has come "a cooling of relations with Israel as the AKP government has underscored Turkey's Muslim identity and sought to broaden its relationships with other Middle Eastern neighbors"<sup>88</sup> Malka asserts that the "AKP government has found it difficult to reconcile its Islamic identity with Turkey's special relationship with Israel."<sup>89</sup>

Since becoming prime minister, "Erdogan has been openly critical of Israeli policy in the West Bank and Gaza, calling its actions 'state terror.'"<sup>90</sup> And one area of specific concern to Tel Aviv is Ankara's welcoming stance toward Hamas, a group with which the AKP can partially identify as a democratically elected, heavily contested, Islamist party. The electoral victory of the radical group in 2006 illustrates how far Turkey has drifted away from Israel's interest:

*After Hamas won the Palestinian elections in January 2006, then Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul and other Turkish foreign ministry officials hosted Hamas's external leader, Khaled Meshal, at AKP headquarters in Ankara. These developments came*

*against the backdrop of improved relations between Ankara and Tehran and Prime Minister Erdogan's periodic tough rhetoric that Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank were tantamount to "state terrorism."*<sup>91</sup>

Furthermore, this "visit was arranged without consultation with Washington and Jerusalem and greatly infuriated both capitals because it directly undercut U.S. and Israeli efforts to isolate Hamas until it met a series of specific conditions."<sup>92</sup> And as "Cairo and Riyadh seek Palestinian reconciliation, there is concern that Turkish activism will provide a way for Hamas to resist Arab pressure to come to terms with Fatah."<sup>93</sup>

The AKP's sympathy for Hamas has been further bolstered by Israel's 2008-09 offensive into Gaza. Highlighting Turkey's opposition to Israel's actions was Erdogan's decision to angrily stomp out of a panel discussion with Israeli president, Shimon Peres, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. And though "Turkish officials argue that Mr. Erdogan's stance against the war was simply healthy criticism," it has become increasingly hard to deny that "since Israel's war in Gaza, relations with Turkey, Israel's closest Muslim ally, have become strained."<sup>94</sup> Though "no agreements, arrangements, or scheduled diplomatic exchanges were affected by the Gaza crisis, and no written statement from any official governmental body was issued... Israel officials concede that Turkey is less interested than it once was in joint military ventures."<sup>95</sup>

Such developments are troubling for Israel, since Turkey "was the first Muslim country to recognize Israel as a state," and "has built up more than \$3 billion in annual trade with Israel."<sup>96</sup> Yet some suggest that

Erdogan's strong reaction at Davos and vitriolic condemnation of the offensive was partially the AKP government "burnishing its image in the Islamic and stoking public outrage for the March 2009 municipal elections, ahead of which opposition parties appeared to be gaining some ground."<sup>97</sup> And even if the Islamism of the AKP has been seen as a catalyst for poorer relations with Israel, "Turkey's secular establishment has been just as - if not more - critical of alliances with United States and Israel."<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, Turkey has hardly abandoned relations with Israel since the AKP's coming to power. Up until the recent war, Turkey had played a pivotal role in bringing Israel and Syria together unofficial peace talks. Unfortunately, "the more that Erdogan and other Turkish leaders heighten their rhetoric," caution Flanagan and Brannen, "the more pronounced the political fallout will likely be."<sup>99</sup> For Turkey, this could mean "sabotaging Turkey's hard-earned role as a Middle East mediator."<sup>100</sup>

## A MUSLIM BRIDGE TO THE MIDDLE EAST

The above sections largely demonstrate the challenges posed by the AKP to the United States. But such existing and potential obstacles may be outweighed by the more ideological challenge of confronting political Islam while promoting democracy. Trumpeting the value of the democracy, even if not forcefully trying to implement it, as the Bush Doctrine had dictated, has run head-on into the reality that full democracy may often mean unfriendly and non-secular regimes: "Polls from across the globe show a growth in religious affiliation and in the desire for religious leaders to be more involved in politics."<sup>101</sup> Writing for Harper's Magazine, Ken Silverstein describes this dilemma facing America as

follows: "How is it possible to promote democracy and fight terrorism when movements deemed by the United States to be terrorist and extremist are the most politically popular in the region? And given this popularity, what would true democracy in these nations resemble?"<sup>102</sup>

Yet political Islam may not be as daunting a threat to democracy efforts as it seems. Indeed, "in peaceful Arab countries, although Islamist groups participating in politics have benefited from political openings, they have generally done so only by adopting more pragmatic political agendas, an outcome that is in the U.S. interest over the long term."<sup>103</sup> Thomas F. Farr encouragingly suggests that "rather than being inimical to the advance of freedom, as many secularists assume, religious ideas and actors can buttress and expand ordered liberty. For much of the world, the religious quest lies at the heart of human dignity."<sup>104</sup> And Silverstein proclaims,

*The new Islamic movements are popularly based and endorse free elections, the rotation of power, freedom of speech, and other concepts that are scorned by the regimes that currently hold power. Islamist groups have peacefully accepted electoral defeat, even when it was obvious that their governments had engaged in gross fraud to assure their hold on power.*<sup>105</sup>

Looking at Turkey reveals many of these positive political Islam possibilities in action. In fact, "in the past decade, the AKP has undergone an ideological transformation, abandoning the anti-Western rhetoric that characterized its Islamist predecessors and embracing a new discourse that emphasizes values consistent with those of Western societies."<sup>106</sup> One need only apply Turkey to Michael Herzog's conditions for the



co-optation of Islamists to occur—the existence of a strong, healthy, and relatively free political system into which the Islamists can be absorbed; a balance of power tilted against the Islamists that forces them to play by moderate rules; and sufficient time for co-optation to take effect<sup>107</sup>—to see the potential for success. The desire for E.U. membership keeps Turkey committed to free political systems; the military and Constitutional Court prevents radicalism; and a long secular legacy has existed uncontested, co-opting or expelling all groups disloyal to Kemalism. Meeting all of these conditions, the AKP seems to be proving that Islam and democracy can coexist.

But Turkey is an extreme case. Much of what has made Turkey ideal for Muslim-led liberalism is impossible for other countries to adopt. The U.S. cannot hope to moderate groups like Hamas by encouraging Palestine to create a hard-line, secularist, independent military establishment, or promote a history dedicated to maintaining loyalty to the state over religion. Still, the symbolic nature of an Islamic (even if only moderately so) democracy in the Middle East should not be overlooked by the U.S. Exploiting the relationship with Turkey under Muslim rule could be well worth the potential snags of the AKP's more confrontational approach to foreign policy. The potential for success is great if the U.S. understands and embraces Turkey's unique position.

Effectively using Turkey's Muslim credentials must, however, entail the resolution of some sensitive issues between the two countries. "Turkey's relations with the United States have become increasingly strained, largely because of the U.S. invasion of Iraq."<sup>108</sup> This is particularly unsettling given Turkey's potential to

help ensure the stability of postwar Iraq. Relations have also been strained by U.S. opposition to plans for Turkish investment in Iran's South Pars gas fields.<sup>109</sup> And Cagapty cautions that "if the West and Turkey are not tightly linked economically, their political and military ties will be susceptible to the influence of Russia and Iran, where Turkish investments have grown substantially in recent years."<sup>110</sup> These developments have contributed to "anti-Americanism" and "anti-Westernism" that constitute "an ugly side of xenophobic Turkish nationalism that clearly exists."<sup>111</sup>

Specifically in the realm of the religious matters that have come into play in Turkey, the U.S. will not be able to move forward without some difficulty. The U.S. began its relationship with the AKP on uncertain ground, since the forced resignation of Necmettin Erbakan, Turkey's first Islamist prime minister and leader of the party from which the AKP sprung, was largely supported by the West.<sup>112</sup> And it will be difficult for the United States to make amends by supporting the AKP in its current struggles with secular elements of society, because "almost any U.S. pronouncement on specific political battles will be perceived as unwarranted influence in internal affairs."<sup>113</sup> But if the U.S. does reach out to the AKP, it should encourage its moderation, since "an avowedly Islamist Turkey would severely reduce the extent of cooperation...and might even challenge U.S. policies in the Middle East."<sup>114</sup>

According to Aliriza, "the key challenge for Washington and Ankara will be to avoid a serious crisis that would strengthen nationalist and Islamist tendencies."<sup>115</sup>

The United States need not consider Turkey hopelessly lost under the rule of the AKP. This party has in many ways opened up to the United States, and shifts

perceived as motivated by Islam can be rationalized by reason of state. Far from moving only toward relations with Iran and other hostile regimes, "the AKP has promoted liberal market policies designed to attract foreign investment and integrate Turkey more closely into the global economy."<sup>116</sup> Some have even suggested that the rise of the AKP signifies "Islam in Turkish politics is rapidly adapting itself to the demands of a democratic and economically liberal Turkey."<sup>117</sup> And when it comes to the Islamic Republic, "good bilateral relations with Iran and regional stability are critically important, not for ideological reasons, but economic calculation."<sup>118</sup> Rather, "Turkey's turn towards the east follows a logic that runs roughly like this: Turkey does not fulfill its full potential when it is aligned solely with United States and the European Union."<sup>119</sup> Far from sympathizing based solely on religion with the country, "Turkey fears an economically and politically isolated Iran, which supplies it with its principal alternative to Russian energy."<sup>120</sup> Islamization is hardly the motivation of the AKP's foreign policy architects, who argue that "if Turkey's neighbors prosper, they are also more likely to be pacific, ensuring Turkish security and providing a regional environment more conducive to peace."<sup>121</sup> Turkey has worked hard to attain its more prominent international role, and the AKP is unlikely to jeopardize this for ideological purposes.

Thus, Washington should not be deterred by the ruling situation in Ankara, but should instead seize the wealth of opportunities to use the AKP to its advantage. So great is the potential that Taspinar claims that "Washington would be hard-pressed to find on Turkey's current political scene a better ally than the AKP to push for domestic democratic reforms and a pro-Western foreign policy."<sup>122</sup>

Capitalizing on the AKP's interest in the Middle East has the potential to yield particular benefits. "Should the United States adopt a policy of greater engagement with its adversaries in the region"—as the Obama administration appears likely to do—"Turkey's own pro-engagement strategy could become an important asset to the United States."<sup>123</sup> According to Cook, "Turkey's ties with Syria have already paid dividends in the Middle East as Ankara sponsored indirect talks between Israelis and Syrians in 2008," where "by all measures the Syrians and Israelis made progress with the help of Turkish mediation."<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, "senior Arab government officials have suggested that Turkey could play an important role 'accompanying' or guiding Syria through a process whereby it realigns with the pro-Western camp."<sup>125</sup> And the AKP need not only be used to tear allies away from Iran, but could potentially be used to put Tehran and Washington on more friendly terms. "We are ready to be the mediator," Erdogan has said, seeking to use Turkey's "growing role in the Middle East to bridge the divide between East and West."<sup>126</sup>

The AKP's acceptance of Hamas may also be of use to its more powerful NATO ally. Indeed, in a recent bipartisan report from the U.S./Middle East Project, the U.S. is advised to "cease discouraging third parties from engaging with Hamas in ways that might help clarify the movement's views and test its behavior."<sup>127</sup> On a broader level, the AKP's friendly relationship with this "terrorist organization" underscores the dilemma faced by the United States in its attempts to reconcile Islamism with democracy. Failing to embrace Hamas, the U.S. is "essentially signaling to the Middle Eastern public that electoral politics are a meaningless dead end—precisely the same message

that this public hears from Al Qaeda."<sup>128</sup> Working with the AKP can bring enormous benefits to the United States in terms of bettering relations with the Muslim world and setting precedents for politically acceptable Islamic democracies. If the U.S. fails to embrace this welcoming ally, it will miss an opportunity to gain legitimacy in the Middle East as an actor at peace with both Muslims and their popular wishes. Reaching out to hostile regimes via Ankara gives Washington much needed credibility at a time when many complained of hypocrisy in its calls for democracy while allying mainly with friendly authoritarian regimes. Using Turkey as a bridge to the region can give the U.S. access to previously unrestricted places, while sending the message that democracy and Islam are not incompatible or inimical to coexistence with the West.

## CONCLUSION

Turkey's experience with political Islam raises questions, presents obstacles, and offers hope. The unique history of the country created both Islamic attitudes different from the rest of the Middle East, as well as a system to ensure its moderate role. Despite a few concerns of growing radicalization and hostility toward the West, the AKP has proven that Islam and democracy are compatible. Even so, Turkey is a poor model for the rest of the Muslim world, given its Kemalist state structure, interventionist military, and history of Western-influenced Islam. The real value of Turkey's Islamic democracy is in its symbolic value, proving that Muslims can peacefully coexist with democracy.

If the Washington embraces the AKP, there is the potential to gain a strategic foothold in the Middle East. Not only can the United States bridge gaps in the

region with the help of the AKP, but it can do so with a regime acceptable to both East and West. Though a limited model of an Islamic democracy, Turkey can still function as an example to the rest of the region, as well as a strategic and ideological ally to the U.S.

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# CHINESE HUMAN RIGHTS:

## Challenges for U.S. Foreign Policy

by Fernando Romero

### THE PROMOTION OF A

universal human rights regime and the establishment of democracy around the world has become a fundamental part of the United States' foreign policy. The U.S. has consistently denounced the People's Republic of China (PRC) for human rights violations since the Cultural Revolution and with increased vehemence after the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989. American interest in improving human rights conditions in China goes well beyond the idealist rhetoric maintained by U.S. leaders. China's growing economic power, economic interdependence with the U.S., tense relation with Taiwan, and influence in the East Asian region make up some of the real interests in fostering democracy and human rights observance in the mainland. Democratic peace theory adherents believe this would lead to better Sino-American relations and diminish the probability of future security and economic conflicts. However, the accomplishment of this policy faces numerous and complex challenges, such as China's history of isolationism and the still unanswered question of the universality of human

rights. After addressing the large difficulties that this issue presents, it is necessary to look for reasonable and realistic measures that can penetrate Chinese political culture (or lack of it) with liberal and democratic influences, keeping in mind that those efforts may yield significant results only in the long term. Through a series of carefully calculated initiatives, such as low- and medium-key diplomatic talks, promotion of a regional human rights regime, support of regional NGOs, and other democracy-instilling measures, the status of political and civil liberties in China can be meaningfully improved.

In truth, after fifty-nine years of rule by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the status of human rights in the PRC may not be as precarious as it once was. Freedom of expression and the press has reportedly improved.<sup>1</sup> Citizens commonly engage in political discussion and criticism of the government, its leaders and its policies. The media, while still under tight state control, is now "forced to respond to consumer interest as a result of market reforms," attaining greater leverage to be

critical and independent.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, continuous violations are still being reported in a PRC that is far from fitting into the mold of a liberal democracy. The case against China's human rights record still includes accusations of politically-driven executions, arbitrary imprisonment, and torture of political dissidents.<sup>3</sup> The government has also been criticized for its violations against ethnic minorities like Tibetan Buddhists and spiritual movements such as the Falun Gong.<sup>4</sup> Failure to significantly reduce censorship and excessive control over the media, including the internet, is still another common charge against the CCP.<sup>5</sup> Women and children's rights violations, through discrimination in both education and work in China's industry<sup>6</sup> and child labor practices in new factories, are additional charges brought against an acquiescent Chinese government.<sup>7</sup>

Assessing the current status of human rights in China and its importance to the interests of the U.S. helps to determine the scope of policy towards addressing this issue. Thus, it is now necessary to focus on



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what the U.S. seeks to gain by a more compliant Chinese government. Human rights advocates justifiably fret when roughly a quarter of the world population lives under an authoritarian regime that does not protect all the internationally proclaimed rights and liberties of its citizens. Regardless of idealistic advocacies, there are rising and concrete situations that make human rights abuses in China a real concern for the U.S.

First, the growth of China as a great power in the international arena in itself represents a threat to the U.S. and its campaign for democracy. Barret McCormick worries that a growingly powerful and influential China's "continuous antidemocracy diplomacy would have a significant impact on the diffusion of [...] democracy throughout the world."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, being a great economic power in the world stage, an unstable PRC is not only a cause of concern for the U.S., but also for the rest of the world, especially for China's East Asian neighbors.<sup>9</sup> If China were to move towards more liberal policies, it would be expected to be less prone to social instability and unrest, which would have rippling effects across the world's political and economic system.

Second, the increasing economic interdependence between China and the U.S. is setting off alarms among several political leaders and pundits. Last year then-Senator Hillary Clinton said the U.S. debt to China (which was estimated around US\$500 billion at the time) constitutes a threat to national security, arguing that China could use its financial leverage to direct U.S. foreign policy.<sup>10</sup> Also at that time, U.S. trade gaps with every country had decreased except with China, with whom there was a trade deficit that went up to US \$252 billion.<sup>11</sup>

It is reasonable to believe that an illiberal China would be more tempted to use this leverage against the U.S. in case of conflict, which, again, is more probable as long as tensions about issues like human rights remain active.

Third, the likelihood of a peaceful resolution to the Taiwan issue is less promising with an authoritarian and defensive China. "With rapidly raising military budgets and army generals eager to attack Taiwan, this China is a threat to geopolitical stability," writes Randall Peerenboom while describing a PRC that already struggles with political instability and discontent.<sup>12</sup> Since the U.S. has made clear commitments for Taiwan's defense, the prospect of an expensive military campaign or the appearance of weakness for not living up to these commitments would make for an undesirable choice.

Fourth, China's great influence over the East and South Asian countries is an important asset that can be better utilized with smoother Sino-American relations. As tensions like China's human rights record are ironed out, relations are likely to improve, yielding important benefits for U.S. interests in the region. This is especially true in the case of North Korea, a country over which China has significant influence, and the issue of its insistence on developing a nuclear program. During the last Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, President Bush met with President Hu Jintao to seek China's aid in ensuring North Korea's nuclear disarmament.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, it is in America's interest for China to become more democratic and respectful of international norms and human rights, reducing the chance of conflict and making China a closer ally in the Asian region. Even after realizing the importance of this issue, however, it may be tempting

to adopt a passive stance, assuming that the pattern of the history of democracy and human rights makes it reasonable to believe that China will eventually become democratic and that the Chinese will then enjoy a fuller spectrum of human rights.<sup>14</sup> This may very well be an accurate prediction, but history also works against the plausibility of such an outcome, particularly in the short term. Certainly, China's ancient history still resonates in its view of the world and itself, and is thus necessary to analyze in order to understand and predict China's domestic and international behavior.

After first coming into contact with the Western world (and to a certain extent today) China has been characterized by a history of isolationism. Throughout the rule of its various dynasties, the Chinese felt no need to get involved with other nations, for "all under heaven could be found within the Middle Kingdom."<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, China could not remain isolated forever, and growing conflicts with Western states culminated in the Opium Wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which saw a humiliated China defeated by the British in the aftermath of the conflict. China lost Hong Kong to Great Britain and several treaty ports (set up under the commonly-called "unequal treaties") were forcefully established in the mainland, where foreigners enjoyed special privileges while Chinese nationals were discriminated and relegated to staff service.<sup>16</sup> This subjugation by Western powers had a profound impact on the Chinese people, nurturing the growth of nationalist sentiments and movements that resulted in China's civil war and the ascendance of the CCP to power in the last century. The new communist government's unmeasured and repressive policies seen during the Hundred Flowers campaign,

the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution, further isolated China from the world.<sup>17</sup> Yet even after the collapse of Soviet communism and the opening of the Chinese economy in the 1990s, China's leaders were still inspired and influenced by Mao's revolutionist goals of freedom from imperialism, nationalist unification, rule for the people but not by the people, order and stability, and prestige and wellbeing for the PRC attained through the Four Modernizations.<sup>18</sup> The Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protests of 1989 were a domestic attempt to force the CCP to enact political reforms. The student-led demonstrations, which denounced party corruption and demanded greater political liberties, were harshly put down by the military under the government's orders.<sup>19</sup> This reaction put an enormous dent in China's relations with Western countries and especially with the U.S. In short, the CCP's historical record of zeal and repression against reform efforts reveals that its level of conservative resistance cannot be underestimated.

In addition to such historical obstacles, there are also powerful and interrelated ideological factors which work against the odds of a Western-style liberal system in China. The universal character of human rights, somewhat ironically, has not been universally accepted. There is an ongoing discussion between political leaders and scholars that confronts the so called "Asian values" versus Western ideals of democracy and political rights, a debate that underlies a thick layer of resistance against political and civil freedoms. R.J. Vincent argues that in China "community and obligation have come traditionally before individual and right", and that, accordingly, Chinese law sets out to maintain social harmony, not to arbitrate claims as in the Western model.<sup>20</sup> Moreover,

Beijing leaders feel that the human rights movement is "biased towards liberal democracy and does not want to see a nonliberal democratic regime succeed."<sup>21</sup> At the core of the so-called "Asian values," duty, discipline, and the collective good take precedence over civil liberties and individual rights. Further-more, authoritarianism is argued to be helpful to economic growth.<sup>22</sup> The claim is made that Asians have traditionally focused on "family and social harmony," a harmony that "chaotic and crumbling" Western societies are willing to undermine in the name of democracy and human rights.<sup>23</sup>

While some see in such arguments an appeal to cultural relativism that approaches an apology of human rights violations, the notions of "Asian values" in China and other countries have effectively penetrated the minds of many citizens, who feel weary of what they see as foreign attempts to trump ancient Asian views.<sup>24</sup> Confucianism has been cited as an important ideological support for an authoritarian regime. Daniel Bell argues that "the Confucian value of respect for rule by an intellectual elite continues to have widespread influence in China."<sup>25</sup> The accountability under law of the government is also said to be hindered by Confucian tradition, under which "justice relies more on the ethical behavior of people in positions of responsibility than on legal restraints on those in power."<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, especially after the civil war, nationalism has become central in Chinese politics. On the name of the great nationalist revolution and its defense, the leaders at Beijing have justified human rights violations against dissidents, going as far as characterizing them as less than human for being enemies and traitors to the nation.<sup>27</sup>



These ideological factors certainly have a strong impact on the justification of the PRC's domestic policy. Chinese leaders feel that instead of democracy, a more pressing issue to the Chinese people is stability and economic development, which, according to them, democracy could endanger.<sup>28</sup> They further argue that the East Asian countries have had success in achieving stability, economic growth, and improved living standards while restricting political and civil liberties.<sup>29</sup> Some analyses ascertain that "allowing freedom of the press and civil liberties decreases the regime's chance of survival by 15-20%," which, if accurate, makes for a great incentive for the CCP to continue to "postpone democracy."<sup>30</sup> Thus, historical considerations and ideological principles and priorities provide a strong case against the belief that China will readily adopt democracy without significant external pressure.

Facing these paramount challenges, what the U.S. can reasonably do to achieve meaningful results is very limited and apt to a long-term outlook. Highly aggressive policy is not recommendable after considering the potential losses of engaging China in direct conflict.<sup>31</sup> Passivity, to reiterate, is also not advisable. Although some predict the demise of the CCP and its authoritarian regime as the Chinese stop settling for economic and social rights without civil liberties, the most realistic assessment dictates that the CCP will continue to head the government in the long run.<sup>32</sup> Thus, all measures must be planned to work under the context of continued CCP rule. Prudence and patience are the two virtues that must illuminate U.S. policy when dealing with the human rights issue in the PRC. This analysis' main thrust has been the seemingly insurmountable difficulties that instilling liberalism in China entails, as

to elicit further considerations to design appropriate policy measures. In this accord, this analysis will end with a modest set of policy recommendations that can play a meaningful role in pushing China toward embracing democracy and recognizing political liberties for all its citizens.

First, frequent diplomatic even-leveled approaches should be maintained and encouraged between the U.S. and China. Peerenboom argues that a "more balanced approach on human rights issues would facilitate cooperation on other issues from nuclear proliferation to international terrorism to environmental degradation."<sup>33</sup> On the latest APEC meeting, President Hu Jintao accorded cooperation with the U.S. on economic topics, but political hot spots such as Taiwan and Tibet were merely touched upon and deferred without advancement.<sup>34</sup> This suggests that it would be better to reserve high-level talks for economic and trade issues, on which prospects of agreement are more likely. On the other hand, it is advisable to leave discussions on human rights and democratization for low- and medium-level diplomatic talks and out of highly publicized forums. There are two reasons to maintain these reservations. First, setbacks and impasses are more likely to arise on these issues, and initial failures would be deleterious to the continuation and success of diplomatic discussions. Second, public disclosure of Chinese or American disposition to negotiate necessary concessions on the democratic issues could incite backlash from the most feverishly nationalist and conservative sectors in both countries. Furthermore, some scholars advise a "quiet diplomacy", whereby instead of basing diplomacy towards China on threats and unilateral denouncement by the U.S., the approach should be focused on transparent and

trust-building bilateral and multilateral meetings.<sup>35</sup> More concretely, the U.S. should try to influence China to consider the benefits of international prestige brought about by protecting civil liberties and punishing human rights violations. Hidetoshi Hashimoto believes that the African approach of "dealing only with clusters of cases" of violations, instead of individual cases, could be a more attractive suggestion for Beijing.<sup>36</sup>

Second, the U.S. should promote a stronger international human rights regime not only in China, but also in the entire East Asian region. Diplomatic approaches should be geared as much as possible towards pushing China to ratify emblematic treaties on human right. It is important to reiterate that Chinese leaders care about China's international reputation, and this circumstance can be exploited not only by pushing for the ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other important human rights treaties, but also by motivating other countries in East Asia to do so as well. This would create a regional movement which would be harder for China to dismiss. After all, due to a growing sense of shared security, trade, and cultural interests in the region, the Chinese would see a larger incentive to subscribe to an East Asian regime of human rights.<sup>37</sup> On this matter, an alternative approach could be the adoption of a regional human rights convention, akin to the American and European conventions, and for which the 1998 Asian Human Rights Charter has been proposed as a potential model.<sup>38</sup>

Third, increasing financial and logistical support for regional NGOs that promote human rights could be a crucial measure for the U.S. to undertake. Hashimoto

argues that “human rights NGOs facilitate democratization and build a human rights culture.”<sup>39</sup> NGOs have been critical of the “Asian values” argument, and have collaborated in its loss of popularity, especially among the young, educated middle class.<sup>40</sup> However, choosing which NGOs to support should be a very selective process, determining which have a better established organization and superior local awareness and reception. It is important that NGOs are sensitive to local customs in order to facilitate more effective relationships and partnerships.<sup>41</sup> Local knowledge allows the engagement of culturally relativistic arguments through “specific examples and argumentative strategies that the East Asians themselves use in everyday moral and political debate.”<sup>42</sup> Some believe that the collapse of communism has left an identity vacuum that not even nationalism has been able to fill in China, thus providing an important space through which democratic ideology can be introduced. NGOs and similar grassroots organizations are in a privileged position to achieve this goal.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, other more marginal and longer-term measures can be implemented as to impregnate Chinese society with liberal values. One approach could be to establish more scholarships and exchange programs for secondary and higher education in American schools for intellectually-promising Chinese students, who are more likely to become the country’s future economic and political leaders. Influenced by democratic ideas during their stay in the U.S., the prospects in favor of reform in China would improve with them as heads of industry and government.<sup>44</sup> However, since studies suggest that around 70% of Chinese students that study in the U.S. avoid going back to China, considerable care should be taken as to ensure that they

do return to a country in need of their knowledge and skills (and their newly-acquired liberal values).<sup>45</sup>

Besides seeking to influence talented Chinese youth in the U.S., efforts should be made to foster grassroots democratic initiatives in rural communities in China. Party cadres are getting more involved with nonparty interest groups and small businesses in rural areas. These party cadres compete with non-Communist local dignitaries for positions in the villages and townships’ councils.<sup>46</sup> This sort of involvement with the community is nothing but an incipient manifestation of small-scale democracy in these areas. Either directly through international aid and investment or indirectly through supported NGOs, the U.S. could strengthen their cooperative and enterprising operations, improving the conditions for democratic practices to grow from the bottom-up.

To summarize, the most obvious conclusion that can be derived from this analysis is that the challenges to address the Chinese human rights issue are numerous and diverse—and of which only the most salient few were touched upon—, making the issue dauntingly complex. Despite mounting international pressure and criticism against the PRC over its human rights record, it is unlikely that it will compliantly respond to international and domestic demands, even though some divine that the CCP might not be able to prolong its rule without major political reform. In the short term, it is unlikely that abrupt change will occur in China. With important concerns and interests at stake, however, the U.S. cannot afford to remain idle. Furthermore, it can also be concluded that U.S. foreign policy toward China must be carefully crafted

around the context and limitations of the problem. Solutions need to be extremely sensitive to the historical and ideological context of the Chinese people. The issue, thus, should be confronted both from top and bottom fronts. Efforts to move China towards democracy from the top include diplomatic persuasion for the ratification and observance of international norms. The support of qualified NGOs and the promotion of liberal values in China’s promising students and in Chinese rural communities are examples of initiatives from the bottom. Of course, these prescriptions fall short in detail and scope for a truly significant and rapid transformation of the PRC to take place. U.S. policy makers need to have greater understandings of all the conditions that underlie the problem to design new and innovative measures that can pierce through China’s antidemocratic obduracy.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. During the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, restrictions on foreign journalists such as requiring government permission to travel within China and interview citizens had been lifted by the Chinese government. Through a decree signed by President Hu Jintao, the lifting of these restrictions became permanent, a decision that was celebrated by the international press. However, travel to the Tibetan region is still restricted. See *MSNBC*, “China Eases Restrictions on Foreign Journalists,” October 17, 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/27243054/>.
2. Randall Peerenboom, *China Modernizes: Threat to the West or Model for the Rest?* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 104.
3. See Hidetoshi Hashimoto, *The Prospect*



- for a *Regional Human Rights Mechanism in East Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 110.
4. Jean C. Oi, "From Realms of Freedom in Post-Mao China," in *Realms of Freedom in Modern China*, ed. William C. Kirby (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004), 264. The Falun Gong is a spiritualist movement that originated in China in the 1990s. As its membership grew larger, the CCP feared the influence of an organization out of its control. Falun Gong members have been the subject of a harsh government crackdown campaign. The ban on the organization has been justified by the sect's increasing political agenda and organized demonstrations. Violations of due process and torture and deaths during detentions were reported during the prosecution of the Falun Gong. See Judith F. Kornberg and John R. Faust, *China in World Politics: Policies, Processes, Prospects* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 50, and Randall Peerenboom, *China Modernizes*, 108.
  5. *BBC News*, "Country Profile: China," October 29, 2008, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/country\\_profiles/1287798.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/country_profiles/1287798.stm). See also Michael Bristow, "Which Websites Has China Blocked?" *BBC News*, July 30, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7532797.stm>.
  6. See Judith F. Kornberg and John R. Faust, *China in World Politics*, 90.
  7. See *Ibid.*, 51.
  8. Barret McCormick and Edward Friedman, *What If China Doesn't Democratize? Implications for War and Peace* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 5, quoted in Randall Peerenboom, *China Modernizes*, 3.
  9. Randall Peerenboom, *China Modernizes*, 125.
  10. Jeff Mason, "Clinton Says U.S. Debt to China Threatens Security," *The China Post*, March 31, 2008, <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/international/americas/2008/03/31/149593/Clinton-says.htm>.
  11. *Ibid.*
  12. Randall Peerenboom, *China Modernizes*, 2.
  13. Ben Feller, "Bush Seeks China's Aid on North Korea," *The Buffalo News*, November 11, 2008, <http://www.buffalonews.com/nationalworld/international/story/501423.html>.
  14. Some Chinese dissidents are optimistic about the prospect of human rights and democracy in China, thinking that it is just a matter of short time before China becomes a liberal democracy. See Liu Qing, "From Moving in the Right Direction: China's Irreversible Progress Toward Democracy and Human Rights" in *The Chinese Human Rights Reader*, ed. Stephen C. Angle and Marina Svensson (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 439.
  15. Judith F. Kornberg and John R. Faust, *China in World Politics*, 10.
  16. Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, "From The Chinese Revolution and Contemporary Paradoxes" in *Human Rights and Revolutions*, ed. Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, Lynn Hunt, and Marilyn B. Young (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 28. In this essay, Wasserstrom references a Chinese urban legend which tells of a notice posted during the treaty-port times at the entrance of Old Shanghai's Public Garden, which supposedly banned entry to "dogs and Chinese". Wasserstrom denies any historical factuality to this tale, but he points out that it has served as an icon for the real exclusionary practices that the Chinese suffered in their own nation at the time of the international settlement in Shanghai and other parts of China.
  17. For a brief historical description of these events, see Judith F. Kornberg and John R. Faust, *China in World Politics*, 31-33.
  18. The Four Modernizations consisted on improving agriculture, industry, science and technology, and military capability. See Judith F. Kornberg and John R. Faust, *China in World Politics*, 1.
  19. *Ibid.*, 77.
  20. R.J. Vincent, *Human Rights and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), 41.
  21. Randall Peerenboom, *China Modernizes*, 169.
  22. Hidetoshi Hashimoto, *The Prospect for a Regional Human Rights Mechanism*, 50.
  23. Daniel A. Bell, *East Meets West: Human Rights and Democracy in East Asia* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), 7.
  24. Judith F. Kornberg and John R. Faust, *China in World Politics*, 46.
  25. Daniel A. Bell, *East Meets West*, 11.
  26. F. Kornberg and John R. Faust, *China in World Politics*, 89.
  27. Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, "From The Chinese Revolution," 24.
  28. Randall Peerenboom, *China Modernizes*, 25.
  29. *Ibid.*, 121.
  30. *Ibid.*, 128.
  31. Judith F. Kornberg and John R. Faust, *China in World Politics*, 87. Kornberg calls special attention to U.S. investments in Hong Kong, which was over US\$7 billion in 2005. With this in mind, she asserts that "any political or economic disruptions of the Hong Kong economy would not only

affect U.S. investments but also involve the U.S. government, particularly Congress, in efforts to sanction China,” in *Ibid.*, 38.

32. See *Ibid.*, 261.
33. Randall Peerenboom, *China Modernizes*, 183.
34. See Olivier Knox, “‘Nostalgic’ Bush, Hu Discuss Sino-US Ties,” *The Sunday Times*, November 23, 2008, <http://www.manila-times.net/national/2008/nov/23/yehey/opinion/20081123opi7.html>.
35. Judith F. Kornberg and John R. Faust, *China in World Politics*, 152.
36. Hidetoshi Hashimoto, *The Prospect for a Regional Human Rights Mechanism*, 137.
37. See *Ibid.*, 138.
38. *Ibid.*, 144.
39. *Ibid.*, 43.
40. *Ibid.*, 141.
41. Daniel A. Bell, *East Meets West*, 12.
42. *Ibid.*, 14.
43. Judith F. Kornberg and John R. Faust, *China in World Politics*, 8.
44. As a complementary measure, participation and workshops on human rights and democratic practices could be made required or suggested for these students, as to further inspire them to seek political change once they return to China.
45. *Ibid.*, 71.
46. See *Ibid.*, 84-85.

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# THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION:

## Idle Dream or Neglected Necessity?

by DANIEL SILVERMAN

**SINCE THE DISINTEGRATION** of the Oslo peace process in 2001, the very idea of a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has taken a severe battering. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon reestablished a unilateral and confrontational policy toward the Palestinians; Mahmoud Abbas' secular and moderate Palestinian Authority has been dramatically challenged by the fiery Islamic populism of Hamas; and President George W. Bush made only desultory forays into Middle East diplomacy. After a second intifada, a second war in Lebanon, and an assault on Gaza, Israelis and Palestinians have reason to evince as much heartless fatalism as ever. The Israeli Left is in eclipse: its focus on a two-state solution has been co-opted by the centrist Kadima party, and its hopeful naiveté has been heavily criticized by everyone from Binyamin Netanyahu to Meron Benvenisti.<sup>1</sup> Today, Israel's foreign minister dismisses "land for peace" and "two-state solution" as "popular slogans" that are incapable of solving the conflict.<sup>2</sup> But is a negotiated settlement between

Israelis and Palestinians really such a threadbare idea? Is there any other choice?

To satisfactorily answer this momentous question, we must take a broad look at recent Israeli history. The peace process began in 1993, when Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat agreed to a mutual Declaration of Principles. In exchange for Arafat's recognition of the State of Israel and renunciation of terrorism, Rabin acknowledged the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and committed to negotiations with it.<sup>3</sup> Arafat's reversal came at a time when his popularity was waning in the Arab states, and even among his own people. Increasingly seen by Palestinians as an outsider, Arafat sought to regain primacy from local Fatah activists and Hamas extremists. The former were beginning to favor accepting the reality of Greater Israel and changing its character through demographic clout, while the latter (paradoxically encouraged by Israel as a challenge to the PLO) were disseminating a fanatical religio-nationalism in the refugee camps of the Gaza Strip.<sup>4</sup> Arafat,

who at the time was exiled in Tunisia, had been absent during the Palestinian intifada, and he had earned the distrust of most Arab governments by supporting Saddam Hussein in the 1991 Gulf War.<sup>5</sup> The PLO chairman was thus in desperate need of a political comeback. The time seemed ripe when Israelis, weary of intifada and the Likud's militaristic and ideological leadership, gave a clear electoral mandate in 1992 to the Labor Party.<sup>6</sup> Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin pledged to make 1993 "the year of peace," and world leaders took note. A Norwegian foreign-affairs institute invited a delegation of Israelis led by Yossi Beilin to Oslo for secret talks with a Palestinian delegation led by Arafat's deputy, Abu Ala'a.<sup>7</sup> The talks produced the crucial Declaration of Principles - signed by Abu Ala'a and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres - as well as a plan for a staged process of Israeli military withdrawals and Palestinian empowerment, beginning with the Gaza Strip and Jericho. The gradual schedule was intended to build confidence and momentum for eventual talks on the most contentious issues.<sup>8</sup> Even so,



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every compromise proved to be painful; and Rabin, Peres, and Arafat faced stiff opposition at home.

On both the Palestinian and the Israeli side, rejectionist elements engaged in violence designed to cripple the peace process. Hamas intensified its campaign of suicide attacks inside Israel, climaxing with a series of bus explosions in 1995.<sup>9</sup> Israel pressured Arafat to control terrorism, but he had neither the power nor the desire to crack down on his fellow freedom fighters. As a result, Israel postponed its withdrawals, citing the Palestinian Authority’s incomppliance with security benchmarks.<sup>10</sup> Progress was also sabotaged by militant Israelis. In February 1994, a Jewish settler named Baruch Goldstein massacred 29 Palestinians in a Hebron mosque. His act of terrorism succeeded in delaying Israel’s handover of Gaza and Jericho to the Palestinian Authority<sup>11</sup> Then, on November 4, 1995, a religious university student named Yigal Amir assassinated Yitzhak Rabin at a peace rally in Tel Aviv.<sup>12</sup> The subsequent outrage temporarily united left-wing Jewish and Arab Israelis in condemnation of the radical right. The “Song for Peace,” which Rabin had sung before his death, became a potent symbol of hope for a more tolerant and forward-looking Israel.<sup>13</sup> However, few Jewish Israelis were prepared to replace the vision of Zionism with one of “coexistence,” and in the end, Arab Israelis felt rebuffed by the peace process. The fact is that the Labor Party’s basic reason for pursuing a two-state solution was to externalize the Arab threat. Rabin, Peres, and Beilin envisioned Israel as a solidly Jewish democracy, not as a multicultural, post-Zionist paradise.<sup>14</sup> In spite of the crucial support of Arab MKs for the Oslo process, the Arab population of Israel was still perceived more as an

alien periphery than as an integral segment of the Israeli nation.

The election of 1996 resulted in a victory for the Likud, now led by Binyamin Netanyahu. Netanyahu’s narrow win has been ascribed to the rising power of the “soft right,” composed principally of Russian immigrants and the ultra-Orthodox.<sup>15</sup> Also important was the average Israeli’s disillusionment with Arafat in the wake of a spate of Palestinian terrorism. “Security,” Netanyahu’s watchword, was the new message of the Likud, replacing Yitzhak Shamir’s aggressive and uncompromising devotion to the Land of Israel. The new prime minister reluctantly promised to respect the Oslo Accords, but he made continuation of the process conditional on Israel’s security.<sup>16</sup> In the end, Netanyahu delivered very little on peace, grudgingly signing the Wye River Memorandum in 1998 at the insistence of U.S. President Bill Clinton.<sup>17</sup> On security, however, Netanyahu was perhaps too zealous: authorizing construction of the East Jerusalem settlement of Har Homa (contrary to the Oslo agreements) and sparking a violent dispute over the Hasmonean tunnel in Jerusalem’s Old City.<sup>18</sup> A plurality of Israelis sensed that Netanyahu’s bumbling political maneuvers were endangering the still-popular peace process, and they delivered the 1999 election to the Labor Party under Ehud Barak.<sup>19</sup>

Barak entered office determined to make a breakthrough on peace. Choosing to begin with Syria, he was quickly disappointed. Hafez Assad demanded total Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, as well as Syrian access to the Sea of Galilee, as a precondition for negotiations. From the perspective of almost any Israeli, the Syrian position



was beyond unrealistic.<sup>20</sup> Barak's first attempt at peacemaking bore no fruit. Nevertheless, in spite of the continuing rivalry with Syria, Barak decided in May 2000 to finally evacuate all Israeli troops from southern Lebanon. The move was widely perceived as surrendering to the Syrian-backed militant group, Hezbollah.<sup>21</sup> It also irritated Yasser Arafat, whose relative abidance to Israeli demands seemed less rewarded than the hard-line rejectionism of Syria and Hezbollah. Thus, when Barak did turn to Arafat as a peace partner, the PLO chairman was reluctant to fully oblige him.<sup>22</sup>

In July 2000, Bill Clinton, hoping for a triumph in Middle East diplomacy after the frustrating Netanyahu years, invited Barak and Arafat to Camp David.<sup>23</sup> Clinton's chief negotiator, Dennis Ross, intended for the summit to address the "final-status issues" (Jerusalem, borders, and refugees), consideration of which had been repeatedly deferred since 1993. Unfortunately, both Barak and Arafat arrived at Camp David without a clear "bottom line" – Barak with a variety of scenarios he presented consecutively as the Israeli "bottom line", and Arafat only with a wariness of any Israeli plan being pressed on him by the Americans. Clinton and Ross, eager for success, wholeheartedly espoused Barak's proposals, but they realized that Arafat was becoming increasingly obstinate. The Palestinian leader refused to offer any counter-proposals, so the Americans helplessly ended up putting even more pressure on him to accept Barak's overtures. Ultimately, Barak decided it was time to make a dramatic final offer that Arafat could not refuse. With mounting pressure on him from many quarters, the PLO chairman stalled, plainly hoping for another offer. When it became evident that none was forthcoming, Arafat agreed

to Barak's proposal, but with a handful of reservations that effectively rendered it moot. The Palestinian leader expressed interest in further negotiations, but as far as the Americans and the Israelis were concerned, the Camp David talks had failed.<sup>24</sup> An abortive attempt at reviving the peace process was made at Taba in January 2001, but Ehud Barak's premiership was on its last legs and the second intifada was already raging.<sup>25</sup> With Ariel Sharon's assumption of office in 2001, the Oslo process was unequivocally finished.<sup>26</sup>

Since then, a majority of both Israelis and Palestinians has shifted to the right. Consensus in both societies now holds that the focus on a two-state solution was misguided and unrealistic, and that the Oslo process was doomed from the start. The conflict between Jews and Arabs over Palestine is irreconcilable – the argument goes – at least in the foreseeable future, and all we can do is to strengthen our resolve and defend our rights until our enemies come to reason. The Israeli government has presided over the construction of a "security fence" around the West Bank in an attempt to unilaterally screen out the Palestinian problem.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, Hamas, emboldened by electoral victory in 2006, has separated itself from Fatah and is defiantly holed up in the Gaza Strip.<sup>28</sup> Incessant talks between Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas have come to nothing, demonstrating the ineffectuality of moderation in the context of existential war.<sup>29</sup> Binyamin Netanyahu is once again in power in Israel, sounding the call for "security" and pointing to Iran as the source of the region's frictions.<sup>30</sup> In this acrimonious environment, is the idea of a "two-state solution" anything more than a pipe dream?

## IT IS HARD TO SEE HOW THE MAINTENANCE OF A SEPARATE NETWORK OF JEWISH ROADS, VILLAGES, AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES ON THE LAND PROPOSED FOR A PALESTINIAN STATE DOES NOT PRECLUDE A TWO-STATE SOLUTION.<sup>38</sup>

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The good news is that the present impasse is more a function of attitudes and leadership than of true irreconcilability. Olmert was a weak prime minister under perpetual investigation for corruption; Abbas is viewed by many Palestinians as an uninspiring Western puppet; and George W. Bush as an intermediary was neither impartial nor particularly dynamic. History indicates that monumental strides in Middle East peacemaking can be achieved by strong leaders with political capital and personal daring. It cannot even be said that no progress has been made since Camp David: in Geneva in 2003, an unofficial conference of Israeli "doves" and Palestinian moderates reached an unprecedented agreement on the final-status issues at the heart of the two-state solution.<sup>31</sup> All that was lacking was an official initiative to implement the Geneva Accord, and its vision remains untested.<sup>32</sup> Its import, however, is powerful. The Geneva Accord tells us, in the least uncertain terms to date, that the Arab-Israeli conflict is far from being constant and unsolvable. Instead,

## A FORWARD-LOOKING TWO-STATE SOLUTION HAS ALWAYS BEEN, AND IS STILL, THE ONLY MORALLY JUSTIFIABLE AND REALISTIC OUTCOME FOR THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT.

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it is an ever-changing obstacle course with a dizzying mix of opportunities and pitfalls. The contestants frequently brush against, but rarely seize, the former. The latter they inexorably stumble into and become entrenched within. The fact that so many pitfalls have come to be assumed (institutionalized, even) on both sides might explain the attitude of hardened pessimism and the dearth of visionary leadership. Objectively, the two-state solution is an achievable, and reasonably fair, outcome – perhaps the only possible outcome that meets both of these criteria. But for it to succeed, two nations oriented towards gaining and maintaining exclusive control of the land will have to officially and tangibly lower their sights, internalize a society-wide lesson in humility, and respect the other's presence at a national and individual level in the homeland.

One of the greatest hindrances to peace on the Israeli side is the longstanding policy of the “iron wall.” Catalogued by Avi Shlaim in a book of the same name, the concept originated during the British Mandate period with Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the founder of Revisionist Zionism. Jabotinsky envisioned Jewish settlement

in the entire Mandate territory to be protected from Arab irredentist ambitions by combined British-Jewish invincibility.<sup>33</sup> Belief in the “iron wall” was at first confined to the Revisionist movement but beginning with the Arab Revolt in the late 1930s, elements of this “offensive ethos” gained currency in the more hawkish sections of the Labor movement.<sup>34</sup> Post-independence, a struggle occurred within the Labor-led Israeli government to define the Jewish state's political outlook. Moshe Sharett and his followers (the peace-seeking “moderates”) were ultimately bested by David Ben-Gurion and his coterie (the militaristic “activists”).<sup>35</sup> The result of this political tussle, Shlaim suggests, has profoundly shaped Israeli policy and political culture ever since. Whether a Labor government, a Likud government, or a Kadima government, the focus has inevitably been on maintaining Israel's deterrence power and establishing “facts on the ground.” The international community, with its anti-Semitic UN resolutions, is regarded with scorn, and the pursuit of peace is subordinate to the continuing pursuit of Zionism. The only exceptions to this trend have been the 1979 peace treaty with Egypt and the Oslo process. Even in these hopeful periods, the “iron wall” was not abandoned; it was merely compromised. Menachem Begin meant for withdrawal from the Sinai and peace with Egypt to gain Israel a stronger hold on the West Bank, and Rabin expected to retain Israel's West Bank and Gaza settlements in the heart of Palestinian sovereignty.<sup>36</sup> Since the failure of the Oslo process, of course, Israel has reverted to its normal grim and paranoid unilateralism. The security fence traversing the West Bank, the brutal assaults on Lebanon and Gaza, and the talk of bombing Iran's nuclear reactors all attest to the ascendancy of the “iron wall”

conception, which Sharett so presciently feared. The fanatic territorial militancy of Hamas and Hezbollah merely fills in an already vicious circle.

In any discussion of a possible resumption of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, the elephant in the room is the settlements. There is little cause for optimism in this regard. Every Israeli government since 1967 – including those supposedly committed to peace, such as Rabin's and Barak's – has authorized the expansion of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, if not the construction of new settlements.<sup>37</sup> It is hard to see how the maintenance of a separate network of Jewish roads, villages, and government services on the land proposed for a Palestinian state does not preclude a two-state solution.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, accomplishing such an impossibility (permanently harnessing the West Bank to Israel proper) has long been the intent of the National Religious settlers and their official sponsors.<sup>39</sup> Meron Benvenisti, an unconventional political commenter and former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, takes a bleak view of the “facts on the ground” in the territories. According to him, the process of colonization has already reached a critical mass for irreversibility. A clean separation from the Palestinians is no longer feasible, Benvenisti argues, and the only remaining alternatives are repressive domination of one people by the other or a bi-national state.<sup>40</sup> It is difficult, though, to imagine a workable bi-national framework that would incorporate Jewish settlements so obviously designed and located for the express purpose of circumventing Palestinian nationhood. The presence of the settlements even restricts such physical essentials as freedom of movement and access to water for Palestinians.<sup>41</sup> What is truly needed, then, is a change in the basic



priorities and worldview of the State of Israel. The paranoid, totalistic ideologies of religion, territorialism, militarism, and demographics cannot deliver a brighter future. Even the continued application of Zionism is potentially destructive to the state and many of its citizens. The Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza deserve an independent nation, free of Israeli walls, roadblocks, military installations, and civilian outposts. The Arab citizens of Israel deserve the opportunity either to become citizens of the Palestinian state, or to be more fully included in the Israeli polity. Israel does not need to become a bi-national state, but it does need to become a more modestly proportioned, predominantly Jewish state that exists for all of its citizens. This vision, movingly evoked in Bernard Avishai's *The Hebrew Republic* and in the conclusion of Amos Oz's *In the Land of Israel*, represents the most genuine realization of the Zionist dream. A forward-looking two-state solution has always been, and is still, the only morally justifiable and realistic outcome for the Arab-Israeli conflict. With unwavering insistence from America and Europe - stimulating bold leadership in Israel, in the Arab states, and finally in Palestine - it may yet be accomplished.

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## ENDNOTES

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