

## The Middle East, Old and New

IN 1902, THEODOR HERZL, the father of political Zionism, published a utopian novel entitled *Altneuland* (Old-New Land). The story is set in Palestine in the distant future of 1923, by which time a “New Society” has been established through the mass return of the Jews. The “New Society” is a cosmopolitan commonwealth, far beyond nationalism. There is no official language or religion. Its members are free to worship “in synagogue, church, mosque, in the art museum or the philharmonic concert.” Jerusalem is dominated by a “Peace Palace” bearing the Latin inscription from Terence: “Nothing human is alien to me.”

The “New Society” is also a showplace of the highest technology. Odorless and silent electric monorails whisk the inhabitants from place to place; power is generated by a huge inclined water tunnel linking the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea, which takes on the appearance of Lake Geneva. And although the “New Society” extends across the Jordan River, and even beyond Beirut and Damascus, there is no conflict between Jews and Arabs, and no need for armies. “The Jews have made us rich,” says the book’s one Arab character. “Why should we scorn them? They live with us as brothers. Why should we not love them?” On the title page of his book, Herzl inscribed this epigraph: “If you will it, it is no fairy tale.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1993, the then-foreign minister of Israel, Shimon Peres, published a book entitled *The New Middle East*. In it, he announced that the familiar obsessions of the Middle East—nationhood, bor-

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ders, territory, arms—had ceased to matter in an era of globalization. A new age had dawned. Nations would redefine their identities. Borders would be opened. Water and natural resources would be shared. Massive arsenals would be dismantled. The Middle East would become a single economic zone, devoted to the cooperative pursuit of prosperity.<sup>2</sup> “I feel that I have earned the right to dream,” wrote Peres in his memoirs. “So much that I dreamed in the past was dismissed as fantasy but has now become thriving reality.”<sup>3</sup>

From the “New Society” to the “new Middle East,” dreamers across this century have imagined the transformation of the Middle East into a zone of peace, prosperity, and cooperation. The dreams of the Jews are familiar to the West, because they have been dreamt in translation. But similar dreams have been written and spoken in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. In these visions, nations live in harmony, and religion is retired to the house of worship. The forces of division, now neutralized, cease to divide; the diverse peoples of the Middle East form around a shared interest, emulating the diverse peoples of Europe.

And have not the peoples of the Middle East usually followed the lead of the West? The national projects of this century were all inspired by European models. Zionism first emerged among the Jews of Europe, and its leaders worked to collect the Jews in a state that would take its place among the secular nation-states of Europe. Turkish nationalism not only attempted to remake a Muslim society into a secular nation-state but sought recognition for Turkey as part and parcel of Europe. Arab nationalism in all its forms drew its inspiration from Western models, liberal and illiberal, as did Iranian nationalism. Not all of these Middle Eastern nationalisms banished old loyalties, and most incorporated religion in some role. But in every case, their point of departure was the European nation-state. If the new point of departure is now the idea of Europe, is this not the next model for the Middle East?

Even the name of the region, the Middle East, suggests a willingness of its peoples to be redefined in new terms. An American naval strategist coined the term the same year Herzl wrote his *Altneuland*: it was a Western invention, defining the Middle East vis-à-vis the West as a transit zone for ships, railroads, and telegraphs.<sup>4</sup> Yet it was only a matter of a few decades before the

peoples of the region adopted the term, to describe the part of the world they themselves inhabited. Could there be a more persuasive testimony to the willingness of these peoples to be redefined, transformed, and integrated in the networks of the world?

And yet, as the twentieth century closes, much of the Middle East resists. A “new Middle East” does exist in places, but there is still an “old Middle East” of tradition. The gaps between them have been filled with dictatorship, xenophobia, and fundamentalism. In some places in the Middle East, secular culture flourishes. But in other places, people live, die, and occasionally kill in the name of God. There are those in the Middle East who communicate from their computer terminals; their place could be any place. Others communicate in fervent prayer from holy ground; their place can be no other place. In the West, post-Cold War politics is no longer the competition of ideologies, but of interests. In the Middle East, however, politics is also the competition of identities. This sometimes obsessive search for authenticity does not fit the neat models of the political scientists and has left the politics of the Middle East difficult to understand and predict.

In this crisis of identities, the prospects for democracy, economic growth, and peace look uncertain. Western experts and the doctors of diplomacy who treat the region have been preoccupied with process: elections, economic reforms, economic sanctions, peace negotiations. But time and again, their ships run aground amidst the swirling currents of unsettled identities. French political scientists crafted a model electoral process for Algeria—and ushered in a ruthless civil war. The IMF and World Bank helped Turkey institute the most successful economic reform in the Middle East—and Turkey now has an Islamist prime minister. The United Nations imposed the world’s most drastic sanctions on Iraq and Libya—and their leaders rule on in defiance. Norwegian peace processors engineered a compromise agreement between Israel and the PLO—and opponents killed Israel’s prime minister and brought down its government. If the Middle East sometimes seems to defy the best-laid plans for its renovation, this is because it is also home to determined people who seek to implement other plans—those first revealed in the Bible or the Qur’an, in Nasser’s speeches or Khomeini’s sermons.

The Middle East will not make only one choice. The region remains, as before, a mosaic—an analogy that is tired but still true—and its peoples are bound to make many different choices. It is composed of four major parts: Israel, the Arab lands, Turkey, and Iran. They are distinguishable from one another by a combination of differences—cultural, religious, linguistic, geographic, and political. The history of their formation can only be told at length.<sup>5</sup> In these few pages, the purpose is more immediate: to map the present disposition of forces in the Middle East's great debate about itself.

#### ISRAEL: CHOICES OF THE CHOSEN

In Herzl's *Altneuland*, the Old City of Jerusalem is vacated of its inhabitants and made into a giant museum. In September 1996, the new Israeli government of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu sought to transform a small part of the Old City into just such a museum: it opened a two-thousand-year-old Hasmonean tunnel, running alongside the long-buried perimeter wall on the west side of what Jews call the Temple Mount and Muslims call the Haram al-Sharif. The tunnel opening, in the midst of a stalled peace process, ignited a Palestinian explosion. Palestinian police and Israeli forces fought pitched battles; there were dozens of casualties.

The tunnel episode, in its incidental way, epitomized the two dilemmas that face Israel a century after the birth of political Zionism and half a century since the establishment of the state. The first, and the most obvious, is the resistance of Palestinian nationalism—a nationalism that Herzl, with literary license, could well ignore but that Israel has always had to confront, either in battle or in negotiations. Jerusalem is contested ground, coveted by both Israelis and Palestinians, and in its narrow confines every change has explosive potential, from archaeological digs to apartment construction. It is also the reservoir of symbols for the conflict as a whole, and when political aspirations are stirred or stymied, every symbol in Jerusalem becomes subject to political manipulation.

But beyond this, the digging of the tunnel exposed another inner dilemma, not between Israelis and Palestinians, but between Israe-

lis and Israelis. Some Israelis came to the tunnel as tourists, interested in surveying a recovered remnant of their national “heritage.” But other visitors came as Jewish pilgrims: the water tunnel allowed them to pass still closer to the “foundation stone” of the Temple Mount, where the inner sanctum, the “holy of holies” of the First and Second Temples, stood two millennia ago. (On that site today stands the Muslim shrine of the Dome of the Rock.) This point in the tunnel became a place where many offered fervent prayers. Heritage site or holy place? It depended upon the visitor’s own identity. And in their identities, the tunneling Israelis were sharply divided.

The state of Israel was founded by a secular national movement that sought to persuade the Jews that they constituted a nation (*Volk*, wrote Herzl) and not just a religious community. Herzl entitled his programmatic treatise on Zionism, first published in 1896, *Der Judenstaat*, “The State of the Jews.” But he did not envision that it would be a Jewish state, governed in its policies by the legal precepts of Jewish law. Neither did Herzl’s heirs, from Chaim Weizmann through David Ben-Gurion.<sup>6</sup> Many of the religiously orthodox took a dim view of Zionism and the state of Israel for precisely that reason: in their view, a secular state for the Jews was a false redemption.<sup>7</sup>

But after 1967, there emerged in full force a religious Zionism that did sense the approach of redemption. In that year, Israeli arms seized the most important Jewish holy sites: East Jerusalem, site of the Western (Wailing) Wall, and Hebron, location of the Tomb of the Patriarchs. Religious Zionists convinced themselves that Israel’s “return” in 1967 to the biblical Judea and Samaria—East Jerusalem and the West Bank—was a sign of God’s intent. And they made Jewish settlements in these territories the very definition not only of Zionism but of Judaism itself.<sup>8</sup>

This religious Zionism, seeing the hand of God in the “restoration” of the entire Land of Israel to the Jews, also rejected any peace based on compromise. A nation like any other nation may make territorial concessions. But a chosen people cannot concede chosen land. As one of the leaders of Israel’s National Religious Party put it: “Israel’s national connection to the Land of Israel is unique among the nations—it is (radically different) from the ties binding the French, English, Russian and Chinese people to their

lands. . . . For us the Land of Israel is the land of destiny, a chosen land, not just an existentially defined homeland.”<sup>9</sup>

By the 1980s, there could be no doubt that there existed two distinct Zionist cultures, one secular, the other religious. Each incorporates within it many subcultures; there are important overlaps, and any generalization must always be qualified. But in the broadest terms, secular Zionism regards the citizens of Israel as the only legitimate arbiters of Israel’s fate. The decisions of their democratically elected governments are the only laws that obligate the state. In contrast, religious Zionism regards the “House of Israel” as the instrument of God, who is the sole legitimate arbiter of Israel’s fate. God’s law must take precedence over man’s law, and government decisions that negate divine law cannot be legitimate.

It was possible to paper over the inherent contradiction between these two Zionisms until 1993, when the government of Israel recognized the PLO and signed a “Declaration of Principles” that promised an Israeli withdrawal from territory in the West Bank and Gaza. Rabbis close to the settler movement acted swiftly, issuing a religious ruling rejecting the government’s right to make any concession by citing divine law:

According to the laws of the Torah, it is forbidden to relinquish the political rights of sovereignty and national ownership over any part of the historic Land of Israel to another authority or people. All of the historic Land of Israel which is now in our possession belongs to the entire Jewish people, past, present and future, and therefore no one in any generation can give away that to which he [alone] does not have title. Therefore any agreement to do so is null and void, obligates no one, has no moral or legal force whatsoever.<sup>10</sup>

It was only one step from this position to the claim that the government of Israel, an instrument of secular Zionism, had committed a punishable sin against divine law for ceding control of parts of the land to non-Jews. Just such a logic inspired the assassin of Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli prime minister who put the signature of the state of Israel to the agreements with the PLO. Until the accords, Jewish extremists had vented their rage on Arabs: the Israeli settler who massacred Palestinian worshippers in the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron (and whose own tomb

became a religious shrine for extremists) personified one form of resistance. But after the Israel-PLO accords, this same resistance turned inward, in a struggle between Israeli Jews over the relationship of their peoplehood to the land.

That struggle is not over, for it is not abstract: there are 150,000 Israelis living in dozens of settlements, and their future has yet to be addressed in the negotiations. But as the Palestinian Authority becomes rooted in reality, the outcome seems unavoidable. The Netanyahu government differs from its predecessor over the terms of Israel's historic compromise but has chosen to accept the principle of compromise all the same. The Hebron agreement, providing for a series of further Israeli redeployments, expresses the broad Israeli consensus behind the principle of exchanging land for peace. Most Israelis wish to be a people like all peoples: they seek the same recognition from their neighbors, the same certainty in their permanence, that the French, English, Russians, and Chinese enjoy. If peace demands territorial compromise—and no other formula has ever worked—then the majority of Israelis are willing to make it. After more than a generation, the dream of possessing all of the “Land of Israel” has vanished. The peace process still faces many hurdles, but the crucial decision has been made: the land will be partitioned.

Once that occurs, Israel will have to formulate a new policy toward the region. Will it seek integration or separation? The idea of a “new Middle East” articulated by Shimon Peres was greeted with dour skepticism by most Israelis. If integration means allowing the entry of many more thousands of Palestinian, Jordanian, or other Arab workers to fill the lower rungs of Israel's expanding economy, then Israelis have rejected it. Their preference for “guest workers” from Nigeria, Rumania, Thailand, and the Philippines is firmly established. (In this, Israel differs not at all from the Arab oil states of the Gulf, who also prefer non-Arab foreign workers.) If integration means closer economic ties and opportunities, this has more appeal, but limited promise. Israel's economy developed during Arab boycott, and its great strengths are in its high-tech exports to the vast markets of Europe, America, and Asia. As a result, per capita gross domestic product, now at \$15,000, has grown rapidly; in absolute terms, Israel's GDP exceeds that of all its next-door neighbors combined—Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Leba-

non, and the Palestinian Authority. Even if the entire Arab market were to open to Israel, it is no larger than a combination of the Netherlands and Belgium. The Arab market is unlikely, certainly in the short term, to offer the opportunities Israel has found elsewhere.

Culturally, the prospects for integration are slim. Perhaps half of all Israelis are Jews from Arab and Muslim countries or their descendents. But their cultural affinity with the region grows more attenuated with each passing year. The other half, recently reinforced by large-scale Russian Jewish immigration, is culturally of the West, and the ties to American Jewry effectively define the West as America. It is not surprising, then, that with the exit of Shimon Peres, the slogan of a “new Middle East” disappeared almost entirely from Israeli political discourse. Israel’s place in the region is now much less debated than the nature of Israel itself.

The emergence of Palestine alongside Israel—and the final fixing of the borders between them—is already intensifying that debate. Since its inception, Israel has been a state for the Jews. It has favored Jews, most notably in the law of return, guaranteeing immediate citizenship to any Jewish immigrant (although the definition of a Jew is the subject of continuing controversy). Might this change? Today, part of the Jewish Left defines itself as post-Zionist, while one of every five Israelis is an Arab—and a non-Zionist. Will they manage to persuade the majority that Israel at peace should become a fully secular and denationalized state—no longer a state of the Jews but a state of its citizens, Jewish and Arab? “There is no Jewish democracy, just as there is no Islamic democracy,” writes a Jewish veteran of the Left. “A state with discriminatory if not racist laws, like the ‘who is a Jew’ law, or the present law of return, or—more serious still—a law defining the state of Israel as the state of the Jewish people (and not a state of its citizens, as in any normal state), is not a democratic state.”<sup>11</sup> Post-Zionism so far has been limited to marginal circles of intellectuals, but in a state of peace, its appeal could widen.

But pressure will also be exerted from the opposite direction, for while Israel is a state of the Jews, it is not a Jewish state: its public law and state institutions are secular. Will an alliance of religious Zionists, traditional Jews, and ultra-Orthodox believers have the political clout to Judaize the institutions of the state? The same



rabbis who once warned against compromise with the PLO also warn against “the present trend that aims to create a secular culture here which is to blend into a ‘new Middle East’—a trend which will lead to assimilation.”<sup>12</sup> The definition of Israel’s political borders, which will separate Israel clearly from its neighbors, could well enhance the appeal of more strongly defined cultural borders—a role long played by Judaism through the centuries. Israel’s May 1996 elections saw an increase in the support for parties advocating just this choice.

Israel thus stands at a crossroads. It still relies on the strongest national, social, and cultural consensus in the Middle East—the cohesion of a small people in hostile surroundings. Its democratic institutions are resilient, and its multiparty politics, critical press, and free markets define it as a Western country. Ballast has been provided by an expanding economy, and Israel’s military maintains a comparable edge. This underlying self-confidence makes Israel’s debate over its own identity far more open, and much less violent, than the struggles underway in neighboring countries. But the parallels are close ones, and they suggest that the greatest tests of Israeli democracy still lie ahead.

#### THE ARABS: DIVIDED IN INDECISION

In Cairo last summer, two events stirred the memory of a not-so-distant time when Arabism still moved the Arabs. The election of Binyamin Netanyahu prompted an Arab summit conference in June, the first since 1990. The Syrian-born poet Nizar Qabbani celebrated the event in verse, in a poem addressed to the assembled heads-of-state in Cairo:

If Binyamin Netanyahu has been able to remind you of  
your identity, of the place and date of your birth, to  
restore to you your Arab nationality, how beautiful it is  
what he has done.

If this man has been able to restore the Arabs to their  
Arabism, and the children of stones to their childhood,

If he has been able to remind us of our names, and the  
names of our fathers, and the names of our children,

A thousand welcomes to his arrival.

Gentlemen, this is the last occasion of love open to you  
before you become extinct.<sup>13</sup>

This was not the only summer spasm of nostalgia. On July 26, the fortieth anniversary of Gamal Abdul Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal, there premiered in Cairo a new film, *Nasser '56*. The film packed theaters in Egypt and other Arab countries. The celluloid saga followed Nasser, Egypt's Arab paladin, as he outmaneuvered the combined forces of British, French, and Israeli aggression. Here, too, there was literary license: the film made no mention of Nasser's failed Arab socialism, the regime's sordid prisons, or the later debacle of 1967. It preferred to tell a clean tale of Arabism's golden moment in a drama that left many viewers in tears.<sup>14</sup>

Arab unity, Arab socialism, Arab steadfastness against Israel—these were the slogans that resounded in Arabic through most of this century. The Arabs constituted a nation, argued the Arab nationalists, and must never accept their division by foreign powers—the post-World War I division that created some twenty separate states. Nor should they accept the alien presence of Israel, or the economic models of the imperialist West. The Arabs should draw only on authentic sources, the same sources that made them powerful through history. Arab nationalism promised power, and to achieve it, the Arab peoples put up with deprivation, dictatorship, and war.

But the reward never came. The unity schemes did not work: each Arab state had its own interests to defend, each regime had its own privileges to preserve. In many places, the slogan of unity became a cover for bullying and aggression, legitimizing the violence of Arabs against Arabs. Arab socialism also proved to be a dry well: some Arabs became more equal with one another, but collectively they became poorer. As for the war to break Israel, it proved costly and dangerous, and nearly broke the Arabs themselves, both in spirit and in resources.<sup>15</sup>

Arab nationalism, the battered preference of an entire generation, may still inspire poetry and films. But to feed mouths, the Arab states now must look elsewhere. The latest "Unified Arab Economic Report" summarizes the problem.<sup>16</sup> Between 1980 and

1994, the population of the Arab countries grew by 48 percent (from 165 million to 245 million—as though the Arab world added another Egypt and a half). Its gross domestic product grew by only 15 percent. This has meant a decline of 22 percent in the per capita gross domestic product in real terms, from \$2,600 a year to \$2,000 a year. As a result, the Arab states have become more dependent on the outside world for goods and the means to acquire them. Food production is now billions of dollars short of consumption; a part of the world that was once able to feed itself can no longer do so. Both oil and non-oil producers have seen a rapid expansion of debt. If the gross domestic product continues to decline—and it could plummet if the centrality of oil as an energy source diminished sometime in the next century—the Arab lands could end up very close to the bottom of humanity.

For the Arabs, then, it may be the eleventh hour, a truth understood nowhere better than in the Egypt of President Hosni Mubarak. Last November, Cairo hosted the third Middle East Economic Summit. Here, “the New Arabs,” as one journalist called them, assembled to do business: “The New Arabs lined the corridors of the Congress Center in [the Cairo suburb of] Heliopolis in their hundreds, equipped with tailored suits, quiet ties and exceptional English. Many of them prefer English over Arabic even when speaking among themselves.”<sup>17</sup> True, the Egyptian organizers announced that the objective was to create more Arab-to-Arab links, and that regional economic cooperation would not depend on “one particular country”—meaning Israel. But Israelis, too, were present in Cairo, and there could be no doubt that even Arab-to-Arab links now depended upon Middle Eastern peace—and Israel.

Yet while Arab pragmatists put ideology behind them, there is still an unease in Arab lands, a sense that the most flammable fabrics of identity could be set ablaze. In many places, what is variously called Islamism or Islamic fundamentalism has already made sparks fly. Islamism in Arab lands rests upon many of the same premises as Arab nationalism: it too claims that a return to authentic sources is the only way to strengthen the Muslims and confer power upon them. But Islamism pretends to more authenticity than even Arabism. Arab nationalism, despite its anti-imperialist posture, borrowed its idea of the nation from Europe: Arabs spoke one language, thus Arabs formed one nation. But Islamism

avows that religion, not language, is the basis of identity. The community of Muslim believers constitutes the nation and the focus of natural solidarity, as it did for the first millennium of Islam. This idea in Arab lands goes back to the Muslim Brotherhood, who first organized in Egypt between the world wars. Since the mid-1970s, Islamism has found a following in most Arab countries, and it has become the most widespread form of dissent.

But the appeal of Islamism also has its limits. Much of this has to do with a certain divorce from changing realities. Most notably, Islamism proposes to intensify the Arab struggle against Israel. "The extermination of the Jews is a specific obligation placed on the people of Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon," says the exiled leader of the Saudi Islamist opposition in a typical statement, "because they have occupied their land." Islamic law obliges Muslims to "destroy the Jewish entity and annihilate it from its roots through holy war."<sup>18</sup> Such words sometimes have been translated into deeds, most strikingly in the Hamas bombings in the heart of Israel's cities in the spring of 1996. The words and the deeds are not without sympathizers: there long will be a profound sense among the Arabs that Israel is the offspring of aggression and usurpation. But far fewer Arabs accept the Islamist claim that a pragmatic compromise would defy the will of God, and most know well that an Islamist "holy war" would risk the destruction of the Arabs themselves. Islamists aside, most Arabs have concluded, sometimes ruefully, that it is preferable to live in peace alongside an Israel that has parted from some territory and ceded some power.

But Islamism also stirs another, even deeper resistance among many Arabs. Islamism is an ideology of difference: between Muslim and non-Muslim, believer and secularist, men and women. Islamism does not simply erect barricades between Islam and Israel; it also erects barricades right through the heart of society. Everywhere it arises, it exacerbates those differences, and so carries with it the potential of civil war. Today, Islamists hold power in one Arab country, Sudan—and it is a country torn by civil war, between Muslims of the north and non-Muslims of the south. Islamists came close to power in one other Arab country, Algeria—and that too is a land ravaged by civil war, between Islamists and secularists. Islamism, which pretends to unify, in practice

divides societies against themselves, and where that has happened, the costs have been immense, in lost lives, devastated homes, and ruined economies.

Arab regimes have rallied against the Islamists over the past few years, and the initiative is now back in their hands. Much of their success is due to the effectiveness of their suppression. But it is also due in no small measure to the choice of millions of dispossessed and alienated people who nevertheless resist the siren call of Islamism, lest they too suffer the fate of Sudan and Algeria. "Islam is the solution," chant the Islamists; but enough Arab Muslims have concluded that Islam, as understood by the Islamists, is one more problem.<sup>19</sup>

If Islamism now follows Arabism down the same road to failure, what choices are left? One is the "Middle Easternism" previously put on offer by Israel and promoted by American peace diplomacy. For a brief moment, the Arabs entertained the option. Yes, we are Arabs, the argument went, but we also belong to a Middle Eastern "system" of which Israel is also a part. But as disillusionment with the pace of the peace process seeped into the Arab elites, "Middle Easternism" became discredited. It is now regarded as a framework that privileges Israel and even as a dark conspiracy to establish Israeli economic hegemony over the Arabs. (In bookstores in Arab capitals, *The New Middle East* has been spotted often alongside *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.) At best, "Middle Easternism" is seen as a necessary plane of Arab policy in specific areas such as arms control and water sharing. As a formula for a new level of identity, it has almost no resonance.<sup>20</sup>

For some in the Arab lands, the preferred solution is an identity that links them at some level with the West. The idea is not new. In 1938, the Egyptian critic and novelist Taha Husayn published a book entitled *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr* (The Future of Culture in Egypt). Husayn argued that Egypt and the neighboring countries in the Levant belonged to Europe at the deepest level of culture. Their true identity as Europeans had been suppressed by conquerors from the East. But the eastern Mediterranean drew upon the same cultural reservoirs as Europe: Greek philosophy, Roman law, Christian morality. The time had come to rejoin Europe and demolish the artificial division between East and West.<sup>21</sup>

Sixty years later, this idea takes the much modified form of what some Arabs have called their “Mediterranean option.” Its discussion was prompted, above all, by the Barcelona Conference of November 1995, which brought together the members of the European Union and twelve “partners” from the southern and southeastern Mediterranean. The Barcelona Declaration initiated what is called the “Euro-Mediterranean partnership,” designed to promote cooperation in the fields of security, economics, and culture. Its most ambitious objective is the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean free-trade zone by the year 2010. In the meantime, the partnership has become the principal avenue for EU aid and loans to Arab countries.<sup>22</sup>

The idea of “Mediterraneanism” now has moved to the fore of the Arab debate. In every respect, it is less threatening than “Middle Easternism.” In a broad Mediterranean framework, Israel is not an economic giant but one more partner, effectively balanced by Europe. The “Mediterranean option” also marginalizes the United States and offers a flicker of hope that some kind of great power rivalry might be reintroduced into the region and enhance Arab maneuverability vis-à-vis Israel. But when “Mediterraneanism” is discussed as identity, the discussion does not go far, since nearly every Arab analyst is at pains to emphasize that it cannot be an alternative to Arab-Islamic identity.<sup>23</sup> Since the advent of Islam, the sea has been a boundary between cultures, not a bridge, and so it remains.

Indeed, for Europe, the point of the Barcelona process is to promote separation, not integration: Europe is to provide the southern Mediterranean with sufficient food, housing, jobs, and hope so that its multitudes do not cross the sea as migrants. Nothing so exposes the myth of the Mediterranean as the tension-filled relations between migrant Arabs and the host societies of southern Europe. If the Mediterranean’s emerging institutions work as they are intended, especially the Euro-Mediterranean free-trade area, they will open a bridge over the sea for trade and aid—but close it to people.

Still, this cooperation with Europe is now the hope of elites and middle classes on the Arab shores of the Mediterranean. For these people, besieged by burgeoning populations and Islamist threats, the infusion of resources from across the sea might make a differ-

ence. All indications are that the Arab states that have liberalized their economies are poised for modest growth, and that populations will not expand as rapidly in the next decades. If so, the “Mediterranean option” could jump-start the region and may eventually develop the cultural dimension it now lacks.

But if there is one abiding obstacle to the Arabs imagining themselves as part of the post-Cold War West, it is the leaders-for-life who still determine the parameters of Arab politics. The Islamists tried to break that monopoly, but their own indiscriminate violence reinforced it, and the men who have ruled the Arabs for two decades or more continue to rule. With each passing year, these leaders grow one year older while the populations grow ever younger. There is little sign that the rule of one man and one party is likely to collapse in any Arab country; nowhere are elections held that could be described as free and fair. The Gulf War that followed the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait had no effect on this pattern of governance, which is evidence of its tenacity.

But whatever one thinks of Arab authoritarianism—and its failings are legion—it is responsible for one basic transformation. It has established the primacy of the state in the hierarchy of loyalties in Arab lands. For now and for the foreseeable future, no other identity can compete effectively with the separate identity promoted by each of some twenty Arab states. Yes, these people are Arabs, and the great majority are Muslims. But for purposes of political identification, most prefer to call themselves Egyptians and Iraqis, Jordanians and Moroccans, Palestinians and Syrians. In Arab lands, the state is stronger than society: it displays power, dispenses patronage, guarantees order.<sup>24</sup> Western powers created many of these states *ex nihilo*, yet they have become the focus of practical loyalty for most of their citizens or subjects. This is a pragmatic choice to avoid choice; it is identity by default.

Given the failure of past ideologies, this resolute pragmatism is the one option that has not been tried and found wanting. If it leaves even some parts of the Arab world more productive, peaceful, and stable, it will have surpassed every populist ideology ever framed in modern Arabic. Such an outcome would itself constitute a new order—not a borderless utopia, but a place where borders are finally respected, where every state is legitimate, where reasons

of state open room for compromise. The formula might work—if it is not already too late.

#### TURKEY AND IRAN: GROWING DOUBTS

The massive pinkish building that is now the museum of Aya Sofya in Istanbul was first consecrated in 537 as a cathedral by its builder, the Byzantine Emperor Justinian. Following the Ottoman conquest of the city in 1453, Mehmed the Conqueror transformed the church into a mosque. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk ordered it made into a museum in 1934. The secularizing of Aya Sofya complemented the many reforms of Atatürk, all meant to proclaim that Turkey was a secular nation-state and a part of Europe.

But in the 1990s, voices were raised in Turkey demanding that Aya Sofya again be made into a mosque. An Islamist party, the Refah (Welfare) Party, had gained strength in Istanbul, capturing the municipality in 1994. An area of the museum was marked off for Muslim worshippers; its minarets began to broadcast the call to prayer. This was but a prelude: in December 1995, the Islamists made their strongest showing ever in parliamentary elections, and by the spring, Turkey had its first Islamist prime minister, Necmettin Erbakan.

It was a striking paradox. Turkey had made the most resolute choice in favor of secularism of any Muslim country. Beginning in the nineteenth century, intellectuals began to set aside the long history of conflict with Europe to advocate emulation. “We are bound, whether we like it or not, to Europeanize,” wrote one influential thinker at the turn of the century. “Let us leave those Arab books and embrace passionately the modern books which can fill our brains with the sciences and techniques. Surely, we shall find these not among the Arabs, but in the West.”<sup>25</sup> Atatürk made this preference a political and ideological program, declaring secularism to be a basic principle of the Turkish national state that he constructed from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. Republican Turkey’s constitution (Article 24) forbids “even partially basing the fundamental social, economic, political, and legal order of the state on religious tenets.” The Turkish political class was also determined to make modern Turkey part of Europe—and, after



the outbreak of the Cold War, part of the Western alliance. In 1952, Turkey was admitted to NATO as a full member.

But the identity chosen by republican Turkey in the first half of this century has come under mounting pressure in the latter half. One force has been rapid population growth. Istanbul is the part of Turkey that lies physically in Europe; it has always worn Europe's garb most comfortably. Its transformation is telling. In 1970, Istanbul's population was three million; in 1985, over five million; and today, over ten million. It will soon be the most populous city in Europe, but its new inhabitants have come from villages and towns across Anatolia, where identity is still rooted in Islamic religion and rural tradition. These mobile masses are the reason why many in Europe refuse to entertain the inclusion of Turkey in the European Union—a fact the Islamists are quick to summon in their argument that Turkey, in turn, should reject Europe. Another disintegrative factor has been the rise of Kurdish separatism, an often violent reminder that Turkey has not achieved full integration as a homogeneous nation-state of Turkish-speakers.

Over the past two decades, the Turkish consensus has been slowly eroded. A rapidly expanding economy has cushioned the impact, and the military, which has intervened in the past to maintain the core principles of the state, remains in barracks for now. But the uneasy power-sharing between Islamist and secularist parties has brought the competition of identities into the cabinet, where it is now played out in battles over domestic and foreign policy. The Islamist half of the Turkish government has especially angered its NATO partners by overtures to Libya, and its American ally by flirtations with Iran. Now it is busy trying to put together a bloc of Muslim developing countries, with Turkey at its core, as an alternative to the EU—although the present trade among these countries is minuscule.

Turkey has not gone Islamist. The Refah Party won just over 21 percent of the vote; the vast majority of Turkish voters chose parties that divide over many issues but not over the secular character of the state. Even half of the Refah Party's voters prefer to describe themselves in polls as "secular." Prime Minister Erbakan knows this well, and he has shown due caution.<sup>26</sup> But the sharing of power by the Islamists has already changed the rhetoric of Turkish politics, and Turkey now emits mixed signals to its neigh-

bors and the world. A significant minority of Turks has lost confidence in the choices made by Atatürk and his generation; they would throw open the issue of Turkey's identity for renegotiation. If Turkey's parliamentary democracy, its secular public order, and its Western alliances are ever cast into question, this would represent Islamism's greatest triumph since Iran's revolution. The irony is that the West, having won the Cold War, may prefer to see Turkey drift towards Islam than see more Turkish migrants drift into Europe's cities.

Another irony is that this comes at a moment when Iran's own choice of an Islamic identity has been cast into doubt. There are no reliable barometers for this generalization: in Iran, the electoral menu does not include avowedly secular candidates. The hopefuls who wished to run in the March 1996 parliamentary elections were first vetted; only 60 percent received the stamp of approval permitting them to run. Needless to say, none openly championed the cause of de-Islamization.

But evasion of Islamic strictures is rampant. Behind closed doors, secular Iranians conduct themselves as they would in London or Los Angeles. The clandestine secular society is impossible to repress and, for the most part, the regime does not try. While the authorities, with tens of thousands of morality police, can enforce Islamic norms in the streets, they cannot impose them on people's minds. The revolution still has a broad-based constituency. But beneath the surface, Iranians seem divided over who they are and what they value.

As in Turkey, secularism in Iran had nineteenth-century roots. In many instances, early Iranian secularists adopted a militantly anti-clerical and even anti-Islamic tone, calling for the complete disestablishment of religion. "The existence of philosophers and learned men has rendered the existence of prophets unnecessary," wrote a leading secularizer. "They say that science is more honorable than faith, and that it is better to understand than to believe."<sup>27</sup> This militant secularism went hand-in-hand with Iranian nationalism, the idea that there existed a racially-based Iranian people millennia before the advent of Islam. In this view, Islam represented the corruption of a great Iranian civilization by primitive Arab influences. It could be discarded at no cultural cost.<sup>28</sup>

The Pahlavi dynasty attempted to do just that, through secularizing reforms comparable to those undertaken in Turkey. Their failure may be attributed to many causes—a smaller base of Westernization, the enduring authority of the Muslim clergy, the arrogance of the monarchy—but by the mid-1970s, Iranians had grown angry at this forced redefinition. The regime's denigration of their living traditions and memories, and its celebration of forgotten dynasties and lost civilizations, constituted an assault on their self-esteem. One revolutionary Islamist wrote that Iranians displayed two characteristics:

- (1) alienation, or even in some instances "hatred," from "self," from their own religion, culture, worldview, and character; and (2) a deep, obsessive, or even boastful pretension to attachment to the West, and rootless and vulgar modernism.<sup>29</sup>

Khomeini promised to restore the lost self-esteem. As Muslims, he assured them, they were God's chosen people, put upon this earth to right the wrongs done by the arrogant. In a swift revolution, Iran became an Islamic state, and its leaders told its people that as Muslims they had assumed the leading role in human history.

The first decade of the Islamic republic—Khomeini's decade—was dominated by a radical attempt to remake Iran in the image of the ideal Islamic state. But even Khomeini realized the dangers of pursuing revolutionary transformation too far, and the effort was abandoned by Khomeini's heirs. The most important reason was probably economic. Iran's population skyrocketed from 35 million in 1979 to more than 60 million today. The increase was so rapid that Iran's clerical leaders had no choice but to encourage birth control, seek foreign investment and Western loans, privatize companies that had been nationalized, and woo back entrepreneurial expatriates who had fled. Under the impetus of President Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, expediency has become the guiding principle of the state. Clerics continue to rule Iran, but effective Islamization has been restricted to public morality and some aspects of foreign policy.<sup>30</sup>

And so the Islamization of Iran, like the secularization of Turkey, is an uneven mix of success and failures. In Iran, the failures are easier to conceal: its elections are more difficult to read, and discontent is not allowed to show itself too openly in the street or

the press. But the day will soon approach when most of Iran's mature inhabitants will be heirs to the revolution, not its makers. Today, 45 percent of the population is under the age of seventeen—a massive generation, born after the revolution. Have the young accepted the redefinition of identity in terms of Islam? Are they more West-stricken than ever? Or might they embrace a new nationalism, an amalgam of allegiances to Iran and Islam? There are no questions about the Middle East more speculative than these.

#### MIDDLE EASTERN ARCHIPELAGO

Is there a “new Middle East” in the making, despite the fact that the term itself has become the subject of ridicule and suspicion in every Middle Eastern language? Many of the Middle East's conflicts have subsided. The Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli conflicts, the Lebanese civil war, the Iran-Iraq war—these costly struggles largely exhausted themselves by the close of the 1980s. The end of the Cold War did much to promote these resolutions by removing great power rivalry from local equations and establishing the United States as the dominant arbiter. Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, in invading Kuwait, discovered too late that the United States had become a guarantor of the regional status quo. Iraq was driven back and put in isolation, and order has reigned ever since.

Today it can be said of the Middle East that nearly all its peoples enjoy self-determination. The states on the map enjoy more legitimacy; their borders are clearer. There are still keen rivalries and suspicions, and some states are using the moment to rearm for the next bout. The civil wars engendered by Islamism, in Sudan and Algeria, run on; the Kurdish question remains an open wound. But for the most part and in most places, the peoples of the Middle East are more independent than at any time in this century. Now they must redefine themselves if they are to compete.

And compete they must. Globalization is a ruthless master. The Middle East was once irrigated by a rich flow of oil revenues, aid, and arms; ideologies and their illusions grew luxuriant. But those days are gone. The Middle East strains under the weight of large populations that must be fed, clothed, housed, schooled, and em-

ployed. If the Middle East is to take off, it cannot wait much longer. At the beginning of this century, the Middle East stood more or less on the same starting line as East Asia and Latin America. It has fallen far behind and must run a much swifter race.

In most places, the preparations underway are pragmatic ones. The Middle East is home to millions of people who will become who they must become to survive. That means, in this global era, that they must at least secularize their policies, if not themselves. The inhabitants of the Middle East have redefined themselves before; their ancient identities were submerged completely under the successive waves of Hellenization, Romanization, Christianization, and Islamization. It is now the turn of Westernization, marketed generically as modernization. The process has been underway in the Middle East for two centuries, in fits and starts. Its peoples have tinkered with it in the hope that it could be made less destructive of tradition. For the most part, the result has been a compromise that has failed to sustain modernity or preserve tradition. Now the choice cannot be deferred much longer, and many individuals have already made it.

Wherever the race is underway, there are winners and losers. The latter are ideologizing their religion, transforming faith from a part of their identity to the whole of it while reducing that faith to one unalloyed element—the “Law” for Muslims, the “Land” for Jews. In each setting, they challenge the secular choice: it will do too little for too few of us; better to run a different race, from the inside track. If we cannot create a rich society, let us establish a just one, for we have a blueprint in the Qur’an; if other peoples refuse to love us, let us love the land, for we have a title deed in the Bible.

One weakness of this kind of appeal is that those who make it cannot cooperate across the region’s cultural boundaries. Any two violent deeds by a Muslim and a Jewish fundamentalist may complement one another, but their authors cannot coordinate their efforts, because they are divided by the deepest of all hatreds. This is not so for their opponents. They inhabit a kind of archipelago, strung out across the region, linked by whirring faxes. They confer, debate, disagree, exchange information, communicate, cooperate. They, too, are not above nationality and religion, but they cannot be defined only by nationality and religion, and they now

appear to have a slight edge in the debate over the future course of the Middle East.

But that debate is far from over, if it can be won at all. The antagonists will be able to claim local victories here or there. But the Middle East has always been a zone of unsettled identities, of constant quests that once produced new religions and that now produce new resurgences. If the archipelago is not to be submerged, if it is to expand, its denizens must produce more growth, more progress, and more hope than their rivals. In the timeless Middle East, that will be a race against time.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Theodor Herzl, *Old-New Land*, trans. Lotta Levensohn (New York: Bloch Publishing and Herzl Press, 1960). For the book in its context, and the reactions at the time, see Amos Elon, *Herzl* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1975), 347–351.

<sup>2</sup>Shimon Peres with Aryeh Naor, *The New Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993).

<sup>3</sup>Shimon Peres, *Battling for Peace: Memoirs*, ed. David Landau (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995), 355.

<sup>4</sup>On the early history of the term, see Roger Adelson, *London and the Invention of the Middle East: Money, Power, and War, 1902–1922* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 22–26.

<sup>5</sup>For an ideal telling, see Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: 2000 Years of History from the Rise of Christianity to the Present Day* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995); for the last two centuries, Bernard Lewis, *The Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup>On the different strands of Zionism, see Gideon Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England for Brandeis University Press, 1995).

<sup>7</sup>On this view in the pre-1967 period, see Emile Marmorstein, *Heaven at Bay: The Jewish Kulturkampf in the Holy Land* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

<sup>8</sup>On the post-1967 period, see Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendancy of Israel's Radical Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Another convenient point of entry to the subject is the five collected volumes produced by The Fundamentalism Project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and published by the University of Chicago Press under the editorship of Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby.

<sup>9</sup>Hanan Porath, writing in 1986, quoted by Ian Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1988), 84.

- <sup>10</sup>Ruling by the Union of Rabbis for the People and Land of Israel, 11 November 1993, quoted by Samuel C. Heilman, "Guides of the Faithful: Contemporary Religious Zionist Rabbis," in *Spokesmen for the Despised: Fundamentalist Leaders of the Middle East*, ed. R. Scott Appleby (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 350–351.
- <sup>11</sup>Yosef Ben-Tal, "A Painful Separation from the Consensus," *Ha'aretz* (Tel Aviv), 10 January 1997.
- <sup>12</sup>Quoted by Heilman, "Guides of the Faithful," 351.
- <sup>13</sup>Nizar Qabbani, poem in *Al-Hayat* (London), translated in *The New Republic* (Washington), 15 July 1996.
- <sup>14</sup>For a report on the film, see *The Washington Post*, 28 August 1996.
- <sup>15</sup>For a fuller discussion of the crisis of Arab nationalism, see Martin Kramer, "Arab Nationalism: Mistaken Identity," *Dædalus* 122 (3) (Summer 1993): 171–206.
- <sup>16</sup>The report is analyzed by Rami G. Khouri, "The Arab Nation: Trends, Assets, Directions," *Jordan Times* (Amman), 2 April 1996.
- <sup>17</sup>Ehud Ya'ari, "The New Arabs," *The Jerusalem Report*, 12 December 1996.
- <sup>18</sup>Dr. Muhammad al-Mas'ari in *Al-Huquq* (London), quoted in *The Times* (London), 22 June 1996.
- <sup>19</sup>For an interpretation of Islamism, see Martin Kramer, *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival: The Politics of Ideas in the Middle East* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1996), 141–159. For recent developments in two important settings, see Gilles Kepel, "Islamists versus the State in Egypt and Algeria," *Dædalus* 124 (3) (Summer 1995): 109–127. The literature on the subject is vast; a convenient point of entry, again, is the volumes of The Fundamentalism Project.
- <sup>20</sup>For the current state of the debate, see Salama Ahmad Salama, ed., *Al-Sharq Awsatiyya: Hal hiya al-khiyar al-wahid?* (Cairo: Markaz al-Ahram, 1996).
- <sup>21</sup>Taha Husayn, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, trans. Sidney Glazer (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Learned Societies, 1954). For the many Egyptian criticisms of the book, see Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Defining the Egyptian Nation 1930–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 51–52.
- <sup>22</sup>For the state of the Barcelona "process" from an EU point of view, see Juan Prat, "The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership," in Anders Jerichow and Jørgen Bæk Simonson, eds., *Islam in a Changing World: Europe and the Middle East* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1997), 157–163.
- <sup>23</sup>See the "file" of articles on "Mediterraneanism" in *Al-Siyasa al-Duwaliyya* (Cairo) (124) (April 1996): 70–137.
- <sup>24</sup>The argument that the Arab state is not "strong" but "hard" is made by Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1995). True, argues Ayubi, the regimes cannot be unseated, but neither can they transform society.

- <sup>25</sup>Hüsayin Cahit, quoted by Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964), 299.
- <sup>26</sup>For two interim assessments, see Sabri Sayari, "Turkey's Islamist Challenge," *Middle East Quarterly* 3 (3) (September 1996): 35–43; and Alan Makovsky, "Assessing the Intentions of Turkey's Refah Party," *Muslim Politics Report* 10 (November-December 1996): 1–2, 5.
- <sup>27</sup>Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani, quoted by Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 158.
- <sup>28</sup>On the attempt to justify this nationalism through historiography, see Mostafa Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation: The Construction of National Identity* (New York: Paragon House, 1993).
- <sup>29</sup>Ali Shari'ati, quoted by Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 122.
- <sup>30</sup>On the revolution's compromises, see Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1993), 132–143; and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic* (London: Routledge, 1995).