This paper examines three current trends in the Middle East: political radicalization, kindled by an unprecedented volume of elections; rentier recession, compounded by the oil bust and the global economic crisis; and military nuclearization, Iran’s putative progress towards an atomic bomb. Surging in magnitude and converging in direction, these three “vicious vectors” create a daunting challenge to current polities, authorities and policies in the region. Focusing on the first two vectors, I submit that while democratic and semi-democratic countries are increasingly susceptible to electorally-induced radicalization, authoritarian states are more prone to economically-driven destabilization. Theoretically, the Middle Eastern reality calls for a more nuanced view of the Democratic Peace and Rentier State theses, two of the more popularized and distorted exports from the ivory tower to the realms of public and policy-makers. The Middle East’s impending defining moments are bound to reveal the fallacies of substituting “electoral” for democratic peace, and of holding up rentierism to provide a bullet- and ballot-proof vest for the Middle Eastern state.

The four horsemen of the apocalypse are never far from the shores of the Middle East. Conquest, war, famine and death are always on the agenda, and often enough in tandem. However, tomorrow seems to be bringing risks to a peak. Though citing the former Secretary of Defense’s poetry is almost impudent in this context, it is necessary to both chart the “known unknowns” and ponder the “unknown unknowns.”¹ I shall confine my paper to discussing the known unknowns, “things that we now know we don’t know.” However, it may illuminate matters if we start with one of the “known knowns... things we know that we know,” namely – radicalism, which in the Middle East often looks like a force majeure, an ostensibly given disposition to confrontation and violence. Indeed, in a region where, according to the recent “2008 Annual Arab Public Opinion Poll” (AAPOP), only a fifth do not sympathize with Al Qaeda, and the three most admired Arab leaders are Hassan Nasrallah (27%), Bashar al-Assad (18%) and Mahmoud Ahmadinijad (17%), it is hard to expect moderation.² The fact that the survey was conducted among societies whose governments

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are among the least radical – Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – makes its findings all the more troubling. It attests to the prevailing dissonance between certain regimes’ apparent moderation and their populations’ political inclination. This dissonance, I argue, will reach a zenith in 2009/10, as an unprecedented number of (fairly) fair and free elections will be held, and economics will place higher and higher hurdles before moderate regimes’ efforts to contain dissension.

In this paper I examine these two trends – political radicalization, kindled by an unprecedented volume of elections and rentier recession, compounded by the oil bust and the global economic crisis – and briefly address a third, military nuclearization, Iran’s putative progress towards an atomic bomb. Surging in magnitude and converging in direction, these three “vicious vectors” of the contemporary Middle East create a challenge that may become a watershed for the region, redefining its polities, authorities and policies. If not met urgently, and wisely, this “change we can conceive of” may bring about disastrous results. Theoretically, focusing on the first two vectors, I submit that Middle Eastern reality calls for a more nuanced view of the Democratic Peace and the Rentier State theses, the two most popularized, and distorted, exports of the ivory tower to the realms of public and policy-makers.

MISMATCH? DEMOCRATIC PEACE AND RENTIER STATES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Analysis of the first two vectors, on which this paper focuses, has theoretical bearings. Few contemporary political theories have approached the rank and role of the Rentier State thesis (RST) and the Democratic Peace thesis (DPT). Based in the study of political economy and international relations, respectively, these theses provide the closest approximations of law-like observations of world politics. Charged with distorted correlation and obscure causation (which disqualify them as valid theories) the two theses still hold considerable sway in academia and media alike. Simply put, RST stipulates that high oil revenues effectively render regimes bullet- and ballot-proof; both directly and indirectly (through remittances) the profusion of oil accounts for the scarcity of regime-change and democracy in the Middle East. DPT contends that democracies never take up arms against each other.

Taken together, RST and DPT appear to disentangle the Middle East conundrum: RST expounds regime stability and the dearth of democracy; DPT regards this lack as the core reason for violence in the region. Prima facie and facing 2009-2010, RST and DPT provide reasons for optimism. Where rentierism has not struck roots, e.g. Israel and (partially) Lebanon, democracy still prevails, and where (semi-)rentierism exists, e.g. Palestine and Iraq, an American-fostered democracy is emerging. As a result, in 2009 the Middle East will know more (fairly) free and fair elections than ever before. Better security should follow. After all, as noted by Condoleezza Rice in 2005, “promoting freedom is the only realistic path to security.” Complementarily, where no meaningful elections exist, the rentier state structure provides stability, most importantly among moderate Arab regimes, such as Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.
This perspective is not entirely wrong. However, as I aim to show, it outlines the wrong descriptions and prescriptions with potentially alarming results. I do not propose here that we dismiss either DPT or RST; both theses are of potentially great value in understanding world politics at large, and the Middle East in particular. However, as the following analysis highlights, there are important flaws in importing facile versions of the two theories into the world of policy-makers. Their misuse and abuse may cause much damage. DPT distortions are prone to overlook two main features of the thesis: first, whether informational, normative, or preferences-based, DPT is predominantly about inter-state relations.\(^8\) It says relatively little about intra-state strifes (usually civil wars), and virtually nothing about intercommunal conflicts, which cut across state-borders. Hegre et al. argue that “if we focus on countries that are at least half-way toward complete democracy, the prospects for domestic peace are promising… a democratic civil peace is likely not only to be more just but also more durable.”\(^9\) However, and this is the second overlooked aspect, most of DPT scholarship holds that when democracy is still a work-in-progress, the polities are in fact more prone to violence.\(^10\) “Electoralism” is not democracy, and although “the most popular definition of democracy equates it with regular elections, fairly conducted and honestly counted,” there is no “electoral peace,” so to speak.\(^11\)

These two qualifications are of the highest import in the contemporary Middle East, where most of the acute conflicts are more aptly depicted as inter-communal rather than inter-(or even strictly intra-)state, and where free and fair elections, when they do take place, often signify democratization, not a mature democracy. Under such circumstances, elections may actually lead to more political radicalization, defined as increasingly opting for confrontation, often via violence, as a way to handle crises and conflicts.\(^12\) Importantly, elections may induce radicalization not only after a possible victory by hard-liners but also before, if perceived as electorally beneficial.

Qualifying RST’s insights is equally important. First, the rentier state is far from static: the rent trend is essential for understanding the rentier state’s past and prospect. Although oil revenues are often high enough in boom years to allow for regime survival in the bust periods, this is not necessarily so. Second, rentier states are not created equal: some turn to rent more than others and – importantly – use different resources. Rentierism’s dynamic and heterogeneous nature renders it neither bullet-proof nor ballot-proof. I argue that in 2009-2010 the global economic crisis creates a decisive moment for the Middle Eastern rentier state. While democratic and semi-democratic countries are susceptible to electorally-induced radicalization, the more authoritarian states are prone to destabilization. Most of these countries belong to the more moderate camp, where opposition is usually more radical than the incumbent government. Iran and Syria are notable exceptions, with hard-line regimes, but while the opposition in the first is more moderate, in the latter it is probably more radical.

A final theoretical note is due. DPT and RST provide either a necessary or a sufficient explanation, not both. RST points to a necessary but insufficient condition for democracy; DPT suggests a sufficient but not necessary condition (for peace): non-rentierism is presented as a prerequisite for democracy, but does not suffice in and of itself; democracies do not fight each
other, but peace can exist between other regime-type dyads. Unfortunately, no literature seriously
tries to integrate insights from the two theses into one comprehensive theory. Though such an
endeavor exceeds the scope of this paper, it may provide a lead as to its value and content.

I shall turn now to discuss the three “vicious vectors” of the contemporary Middle East:
electoral radicalization, rentier recession and military nuclearization.

**ELECTORALLY-INDUCED POLITICAL RADICALIZATION**

In 2008 many in the Middle East awaited the U.S. elections; in 2009 attention is directed
inwards, inter alia to a series of general elections, unprecedented in numbers and meaning. But the
attention of the U.S. must also be directed towards this age-old region, not only closely watching
elections with anticipation, while hoping for the best results, but actively seeking to reduce the pre-
elections potential for radicalization and promote the moderates” chances of winning. I shall
examine the potential for political radicalization via upcoming general elections in places where
they may actually matter and lead to changes of governments: Israel, the Palestinian Authority,
Lebanon, Iraq and Iran. My aim here is not to predict the prospected results in each poll, nor to
provide a full analysis of each case study, but rather to succinctly examine the five cases in order to
reveal whether elections in each promotes peace and moderation. Unfortunately, this analysis
shows, ballots and bullets coexist.¹³

First in line is Israel. It merits a somewhat lengthier analysis than the following four cases,
as it is the more mature democracy, yet still prone to radicalization processes inter alia via elections.
Indeed it seems that the February elections may have already taken their radicalizing toll. Though
Kissinger”’s “Israel has no foreign policy, only domestic policy” is obviously too simplistic, the
internal power struggle cannot but bear on external behavior. Prior to the clash in Gaza, the Likud,
headed by the hawkish former PM Benjamin Netanyahu had been consistently leading in opinion
polls, securing more than 30 seats (out of 120) in the parliament. The Labor party, the predominant
party until 1977 and subsequently one of the two leading parties, was down to 7-8 seats, barely the
5ᵗʰ largest party.¹⁴ The Israeli operation temporarily boosted support for the Labor Party, headed by
Defense Minister Ehud Barak. The *War and Peace Index* (December 2008) survey, that was
conducted ten days after the launching of Operation Cast Lead, revealed 94% of public support for
the operation among Israeli Jews; 62% expressed confidence in Defense Minister Ehud Barak.¹⁵

In establishing the possible relations between elections and radicalization it is of interest to
take note of Israeli politics since the signing of the Oslo Accords (1993). In each election campaign
where the Labor contender for premiership was also the incumbent Defense Minister, a grand
military confrontation ensued. Operation Grapes of Wrath (April 1996) took place a month before
the elections with Shimon Peres as PM and a Defense Minister; the first months of the Second
Intifada (September 2000) with Ehud Barak as PM and Defense Minister, led to the February 2001
prime ministerial election. Operation Cast Lead fits this pattern. This is not to argue that harsh
Israeli reactions have been unwarranted or unprovoked. It does suggest that Hezbollah’s attacks, the
Palestinian uprising and finally, the Hamas rockets, have created an electoral burden, obliging a relatively dovish contender to react forcefully. This pattern, however, also suggests the dubious electoral wisdom of the military moves. In both 1996 and 2001 Labor’s candidates lost. Electorally, radicalism did not pay off.

This may also be the case of the 2009 elections. While Labor temporarily benefited from the Gaza clash, the latter did not damage the Likud or substantially alter the general division of votes between left and right. Here the polls have been rather stable, projecting a gap of about 8 seats: 64 for the right wing and 56 for the left, the latter including anti-Zionist Arab parties, which have never been part of any Israeli coalition, and all of Kadima, most of whom are ex-Likud members. Arian and Shamir conclude that forty years after the onset of occupation, “the territories cleavage has overwhelmed other dimensions of Israeli political competition.” Thus, although “since the early 1990s the once stable, even frozen, Israeli party system has exhibited enormous change… the Israeli party system is still governed by the 1977 realignment.” Electorally, this alignment now seems predominantly right-wing.

The apparent preference of Israelis for right-wing parties is actually quite puzzling (and one should note that the gap between supporters of the right and left is even wider among Israeli Jews, amounting to about 10%). Granted, the perceived failure of the 2006 Lebanon War and the prevalent political corruption has boosted right-wing opposition. However, these two failings were mostly attributed to three individuals, two of whom are already out of office (the former Minister of Defense, Amir Peretz and the former Chief of Staff, Dan Halutz), with the last – the incumbent PM, Ehud Olmert - soon to follow suit. Netanyahu’s personal conduct and his economic policies (during his tenure as the Minister of Finance) should likewise have deterred many voters from supporting his candidacy. More importantly, public opinion is by and large much more dovish than the emerging new coalition. Generally, Israelis regard the establishment of a Palestinian state as inevitable, and even desirable, a state encompassing all, or nearly all, of the land occupied in 1967. Assessing Israeli Jews’ value priorities over time, “Jewish majority” has been the predominant value, followed by peace and democracy, with “greater Israel” lagging far behind (about 10%). Since 2002 about 60% of Israelis support the dismantling of most settlements in exchange for peace.

Why, then, support the right?

The core reason is despair. Most Israeli Jews now believe that the Palestinians do not want to establish an independent state peacefully co-existing with the Jewish state. Peace negotiations were discredited by the old-new leader of the Labor party, Ehud Barak. Following the collapse of peace talks and the outbreak of the second Intifada, he unequivocally spoke his mind about his Palestinian counterparts: “What they want is a Palestinian state in all of Palestine. What we see as self-evident, two states for two peoples, they reject.” Barak’s no-partner conclusion still resonates with the majority of Israeli Jews. The alternative to the formation of a Palestinian state was likewise discredited by Kadima leaders. Sharon’s unilateralism was at first enthusiastically embraced by his successors, Olmert and Livni, whose main call during the 2006 elections was to copy-paste it onto
the West Bank. They withdrew from this position due to the war in Lebanon and the ongoing clash with Hamas.

Thus, with bilateralism and unilateralism out of the way, both Labor and Kadima have pulled the ideological rug from under their feet. The *War and Peace Index* (November 2008) survey indicates that 58% (vs. 36%) of Israeli Jews support the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, and moreover finds the Palestinians’ claim to an independent state of their own as justified (61% vs. 35%). However, about two-thirds (63%) believe that “in reality, most of the Palestinians do not accept the existence of the state of Israel and would destroy it if they could.” This bleak outlook has paved the path for Netanyahu’s “economic peace,” which is “a corridor for the possibility of a political peace later on… It does not make the negotiation on final settlement redundant, but creates conditions for ripeness.” A ripeness-theory in reverse, it seeks to substitute a mutually hurting-stalemate with a more palatable stalemate, possibly postponing the need for peace, in effect suggesting a return to the conflict management policies of before the First Intifada.

It is tempting to dismiss Netanyahu’s rationale and argue for his pragmatism (read, submission under pressure). The *War and Peace Index* (November 2008) survey finds that half of the Israeli Jewish public believe that “any government that is formed after the elections will eventually reach a final settlement with the Palestinians.” Discussing the interplay between the conflict and recent Israeli elections, Shamir and Shamir argue that “the campaigns and election interpretations did not contribute to legitimation of policy in this area beyond procedural legitimacy.” Although this dissonance indicates that right-wing victory does not preclude peace, it does hinder its feasibility. It is hard to see how one of the most hawkish coalitions in Israel’s history can reach peace. It is far more likely to resort to more violence.

Second in the electoral line for 2009 is the Palestinian Authority, or whatever is left of it. Though there is no official date for elections, they may come to pass in the coming months. Hamas regards President Mahmud Abbas's term as illegitimate after its legal expiration on January 9, and Abbas himself has said that if Hamas does not return to the table by the end of 2008, he will call for presidential and legislative elections to be held simultaneously, probably in the spring. The Palestinian public concurs: a recent poll found that 64 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip think Abbas's term ended in January. The poll also revealed the core motivation for the drive for elections: re-unifying the Palestinian camp. While 73 percent support Abbas's call for new elections if dialogue fails, just 40 percent support holding elections only in the West Bank. Is electoral re-unification, a potentially moderating move, feasible?

Not according to Prospect Theory, as both Hamas and Fatah will be risking hegemony on part of the land for uncertain and contested control over all of it. The Gaza clash might have changed the balance. If Hamas had been either decisively crushed or triumphant, its leaders might have opted for re-dialoguing their way to the West Bank. If defeated, Hamas might have had to give way to Fatah’s return to Gaza, hoping to regain electorally what it had lost militarily. Conversely,
had it managed to convincingly hold its ground, it might have felt confident enough to have the Gaza cake and eat the West Bank too.

However, between the two extremes, the in-between scenario became reality. Since a reformulated status-quo ante seems to prevail, no elections will be held or else they will be deemed meaningless, as they will deepen the intra-Palestinian rift. This predicament may invite the rise of new leaders on both sides. Tainted by thus far failed negotiations and PA impotence in face of the IDF operation in Gaza, Abbas may be asked to give way to another candidate. The most likely Fatah contender is Marwan Barghouti, currently serving time in an Israeli prison after being convicted in 2004 on five counts of murder. If released, possibly as part of a grand bargain to include the kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, Barghouti could provide Fatah with a much needed public rehabilitation. Indeed, in a recent survey 78% of Israelis supported the release of Marwan Barghouti from an Israeli prison in return for the release of Gilad Shalit. In such an event, Hamas-free elections are better than no elections, for the first might boost the legitimacy of the more moderate. Sans such a scenario, a negotiated peace with Israel is nearly impossible; violence, again, seems more likely.

Third in the electoral line is Lebanon, where parliamentary elections are due in May 2009. It will be an important test for the viability of the Doha Agreement (May 2008) and the new electoral law (September 2008), which benefits Shiites and Christians. Between the solidified Shiite support for Hezbollah (and the pro-Syrian March 8 Alliance), and the strong Sunni support for the (anti-Syrian) March 14 Alliance, the Christians, now boosted by Michel Suleiman's presidency, are again in a position to tip the political scales. Although somewhat less favorably positioned since the Taif Agreement, Christians still command half the seats in parliament (64 of 128 instead of 54 of 99 before Taif; Sunnis and Shiites each have 27), significantly more than their proportion in the general population (about 40%). Much depends on the ability of Michel Aoun to consolidate support for his Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), currently part of the M8 Alliance, and on his future relations with Hezbollah. The recent 2008 AAPOP indicated that barring a Shiite consensus (86%) on supporting the Hezbollah-led opposition, a majority of Druze (68%), Sunni (55%), and Christians (45%), prefer the coalition over the opposition (15%, 4%, and 25% respectively).

The key question remains the same: will Lebanon finally become a Weberian state, where its administrative staff “(successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory”? This may come to pass if either M14 wins the elections and disarms all militias, or M8 triumphs and Hezbollah becomes the predominant political actor, pledging sovereignty and incorporating its militia into the Lebanese Armed Forces. Both scenarios seem unlikely. Hezbollah’s swift takeover of West Beirut in the midst of the May 2008 crisis showed its ability and willingness to thwart any intra-Lebanese military challenge to its power. Defeated in military battle, and granting Hezbollah veto power over any cabinet decision, M14 signaled its current ineptness (though not unwillingness) in “Weberizing” Lebanon. Conversely, though an M8 Hezbollah-dominated coalition (unlikely in and of itself) may provide for an opportunity to integrate its militias in the LAF, a greater role for Syria and Iran in Lebanon would soon ensue.
Sunni and Druze factions will not voluntarily submit. In this sense, parties and factions of both the M8 and M14 coalitions are prone to radicalization. It seems likely that in almost any electoral event, sectarianism will win the day, sustaining the sovereignty void that has already elicited so much violence from inside and outside.

Next in the line of Middle Eastern elections is Iraq. Throughout 2009, and leading up to the general elections at its end, Iraqis will be repeatedly asked to cast their vote, beginning with the January provincial elections. Much like Lebanon, confessional divisions and militias challenge both state- and nation-building efforts. Albeit non-Weberian, Lebanon is still a unitary polity. The 2009 elections in Iraq will indicate if it can accomplish the same. The similarities and differences between the countries are revealing. Both Lebanon and Iraq share a consociational democratic model. Power-sharing in Iraq, for example, looks much like in Lebanon, with a premier (Nouri al-Maliki) from the majority group and a president (Jalal Talabani) and House Speaker (the recent resignee, Mahmoud al-Mashhadani) from the two leading minority groups.

Unlike Lebanon, however, Iraq lacks a long tradition of elections and democratic balancing between factions. More importantly, while both capitals, Beirut and Baghdad, exhibit much confessional heterogeneity, the rest of the countries’ compositions differ: in Lebanon the numerous confessional groupings cut deeply across electoral geographical units; in Iraq geo-demography exhibits somewhat higher correlation between religious/ethnic affiliations and territorial continuity. Lebanon is composed of four main religious groups – Shi’a, Sunni, Druze and Christians with the latter spanning many sub-groups (most notably the Maronites). Their geographical distribution in the country makes the land’s territorial division almost impossible.

Iraq has only three main groups, Sunni, Shi’a and Kurds with the latter two enjoying a clear majority in the north and the south, respectively. This distribution has already made the “new Iraq” into what Lebanon could probably never be – a de-facto federation. However, as attested by the 2005 elections, when ethnic and religious affiliations prescribe political partisanship, the question becomes whether a consociational federation is not merely a prelude to confederation. Al-Mashhadani’s inflammatory comments against Shiite and Kurd MPs (the first dubbed “spies” for Iran, the latter advised to “go back to Irbil”); Shiite imposition of a “New Year curfew,” due to its calendar proximity to the Shiite mourning day of Ashura; the prospect of a sectarian-based policy towards the detainees issue – on any given day, political headlines from Iraq provide ample evidence that the palpable decline in inter- and intra-factional violence has not diminished either ethno-religious sectarianism or its potential to cause the country’s breakup and violence to erupt again. Even before the general elections, the provincial vote, and the approaching referendums on the status of Kirkuk and, subsequently, on the prospect of an autonomous Basra, will send clear signals as to the fate of a unitary Iraq, a vision eroding in the shadow of the American forces’ impending departure.

Last in line is Iran, where elections supposedly matter least. After all, in the Iranian recycling of power, it is the Supreme Leader, currently Ayatollah Ali Khamene’i, who really calls
the shots: he virtually appoints (half directly, half indirectly) the Guardian Council, which approves
the Assembly of Experts candidates, which in turn supervises and elects the Supreme Leader, who
is also the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, and has sole power to declare war. Elections,
however, are not altogether meaningless. Though the right of candidacy is limited, suffrage is
general and free. Elections thus indicate public opinion, and due to the Iranian emphasis on
national, popular (albeit unfree) will – an ideological offshoot of the ethos of the revolution –
elections may in fact set policy parameters for both elected and non-elected leaders. (We should
here distinguish between national/popular will and the idea of “popular sovereignty,” which was
explicitly rejected by Khomeini and his followers.)

On June 12 the incumbent president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will be up for re-election.
Though his contenders are still unknown, the current front-runner for the opposition’s “national
unity candidate” is the reformist former President, Mohammad Khatami, who is apparently backed
by former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the leader of the moderate conservatives. Economy
and relations with the west will probably be the decisive factors in these elections and on both
(interrelated) fronts, Ahmadinejad currently seems to be losing some ground. Disputes between
ultra-conservatives, moderate conservatives and reformists are substantial, and may indeed lead to
revised policies.

De-radicalization, however, seems less plausible regarding Iran’s approach to Israel.
Ostensibly, when it comes to the “Zionist entity” intra-Iranian discord disappears. While most
Iranian leaders have not resorted to Ahmadinejad’s Holocaust denial or vulgarity (his references to
“the stinking corpse of the usurping and fake Israeli regime”), the Iranian president’s suggestion
that Israel “vanish from the pages of time” (erroneously translated as “wiped off the map”) resonates with the official line of all Iranian leaders since the revolution. In 1996 Khamenei
rhetorically asked whether Palestine could “be wiped from the world’s map and replaced with a
fabricated and false state by the name of Israel?” Two years later, upon meeting with Hamas leader
Sheikh Ahmad Yasin he vowed that Iran would not recognize Israel “even for one hour” and would
“continue to struggle against this cancerous growth.” Rafsanjani once proclaimed (November 2002,
Jerusalem Day) that “the only way to save the Islamic world and the Koran is to rescue Palestine.” Khatami, more moderately, preferred to refer to “the hegemonic, racist, aggressive and violent
nature” of Israel (Tehran, December 1997).

This apparent rhetorical conformity may obscure important subtleties. Simply put, much like
on other key issues, the Iranian position towards Israel is poised between dogmatism and
pragmatism. Two phrases capture the tension: on the one hand, “Israel should be destroyed” (Isra’il
bayad mahv shavad), an oft-chanted slogan since the onset of Ayatollah Khomeini’s regime; on the
other hand, a well-known Persian phrase, that one “should not be „a bowl that is warmer than the
soup‟” (kaseh daghtar as ash). While the meaning of the first phrase is plain enough, the latter
signals that Iran should not be “more Palestinian” than the Palestinians themselves (or more Arab
than Arabs, for that matter). If the latter reach peace with Israel, Iran may follow suit.
The great electoral achievement of Ahmadinejad’s supporters, the Principalists, in the 2008 parliamentary elections, was due to two main factors: the ban on about 90% of the reformists and independent candidates and the utilization of scare tactics, which portrayed Ahmadinejad’s opponents as collaborators with the West (and by proxy, weakening the anti-Israeli cause). Banning will be less useful in the upcoming presidential campaign, leaving Ahmadinejad with little choice but to resort to radicalized rhetoric, which, as Middle Eastern history has too often shown, may easily become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In sum, I have tried to show that the 2009 elections invite ample opportunity for political radicalization before, during, and after each poll. It indicates that fair and free elections, in and of themselves, do not guarantee peace and may in fact facilitate the opposite. If such elections define democracy, this analysis defies DPT. Recent wars between the ostensibly democratic dyads, such as Israel-Lebanon or Israel-Palestine, have equally illustrated that polities with regular and general, fair and free, elections do fight each other. Doubtless, this does not amount to a “democratic war theory”: the correlation, though not causation, between democracy and peace is relatively well established. It should, however, point to the fact that what seems merely academic nuances can be fateful in real life. In the Middle East DPT application is qualified by both the intercommunal nature of many of the conflicts, and the lack of political liberalism in those polities in which relatively free elections are held. Importantly, the two are interrelated: the “rise of illiberal democracy” is facilitated by the mismatch between the statist polities and sub-state identities. When the prime collective identity (in the Middle East, mostly Muslim or Arab) is not perceived to justify the collective’s polity (the states formed by colonial powers), the prospects of the latter drawing on such legitimacy in order to become fully democratic are grim.

Before turning to examine the next fateful vector, I should note that this analysis does not exhaust all the expected general elections in the Middle East and its immediate milieu (presidential and legislative elections are expected in Tunisia and a presidential election in Afghanistan). Nor does it include the potential radicalization that may take place in countries where no forthcoming general elections are expected, e.g. Egypt, Jordan, and Syria (where elections hardly matter even when they do take place). Faced with changing circumstances, even the more established and moderate of the region’s governments may opt for radicalization.

Recently it was Israel’s decision to extend its military operation in Gaza to include ground attacks that induced the leaders of Egypt, Jordan and Turkey to escalate the rhetoric. President Hosni Mubarak issued a declaration, warning “of the consequences of Israel's savage aggression,” placing “the onus on Israel for the innocent civilians martyred and wounded.” Jordan's Prime Minister Nader Dahabi said “Jordan will look into all options, including reconsidering relations with Israel.” Turkey's Premier Recep Erdoğan accused Israel of committing "inhuman" acts in Gaza that would cause it to self-destruct. Turkish President Abdullah Gül added that, “what Israel has done is nothing but atrocity.”
Although these proclamations do not necessarily reflect real perceptions or intentions, they do point to the potential for political radicalization even among the more moderate Middle Eastern regimes. Indeed, it would seem that Erdoğan in particular has managed to ride the tide of radicalization following the Israeli Gaza operation (the coming March 2009 local and municipal elections may have played a role in inciting his rhetoric). A tighter Iranian-Syrian-Turkish cooperation seems more likely than ever before. Though not facing an impending general election, however, Turkey’s AKP coalition is also susceptible to the economic recession discussed in the next section.

**Rentier Recession**

The second vicious vector of 2009 presents a fateful challenge to the rentier Middle Eastern state. The rentier state relates, but is not identical to, the resource curse. The latter, aka the “Dutch disease,” denotes intra-societal rent-seeking dynamics, explaining why a surge in natural resources often leads to a decline in the manufacturing sector. Transposed to the international level of analysis, the rentier state thesis transposes (and transforms) the resource curse argument. According to Beblawi’s widely accepted definition, rentierism is predicated on (1) rents being predominant in the state income; (2) rents being substantially external, coming from abroad; (3) “only few are engaged in the generation of this rent (wealth), the majority being only involved in the distribution or utilisation of it” (i.e. the government receives the revenue and then allocates to the public, which is not involved in creation of the wealth); and (4) “the government is the principal recipient of the external rent in the economy.” The rentier state is thus an allocation state, rather than a non-rentier production state. An underlying effect is that the external rents greatly diminish the government’s need to tax the population for its revenue.

Initially conceived in reference to the contemporary Middle East, RST addresses some of the region’s most perplexing questions. What explains the stability of Arab regimes since the late 1960s, considering their fragility up until that time? What accounts for the lack of democracy in Arab countries? Is regime stability and lack of democracy linked to the pattern of modernization and development in these countries?

Briefly, the ever-expanding RST literature answers that (1) rentierism, rather than war-making, is a major source of regime stability, not least in the Arab Middle East; (2) rentierism (of oil and other minerals) hinders democracy in the Middle East as well as elsewhere and more so in poor countries; (3) rentierism serves as a politico-economic trap; it impedes modernization and, especially in the Arab Middle East, conserves a neopatrimonial disposition, epitomized in the patronage *wasta* system, which regards personal contacts with power-holders, rather than labor, personal capacity or merit, as the key to material well-being.

Theoretically, RST, much like DPT, seems almost too good to be true. It offers a simple single explanation for a complex reality: rentierism provides the Middle Eastern country with a bullet- and ballot-proof vest. This is a wrong impression. Two important qualifications are in order:
the rentier state is neither uniform nor static. Understanding the heterogeneous and dynamic nature of the Middle Eastern rentier state is essential for deciphering the ways in which it may indeed face regime change and democratization processes.

First, not all rentier states are created equal: some are more rentier than others, and – importantly – use different resources for their rents. “Petrolism is characterized not only by high levels of rent income for the major oil-producing countries, but also by an intra-regional transfer of oil revenues to economies with little or no mineral resources to exploit.” In addressing the rent resources we can distinguish not just between oil, gas and other mineral resources, but between (1) the country’s own natural resources, (2) its workers’ remittances, (3) foreign aid, and, to a limited extent, (4) external tourism. Furthermore, it is not only the type of the rent resource that distinguishes one rentier state from another; also important is the identity of the recipient, which receives the rent revenues and (at times) allocates them. While oil and gas revenues go almost entirely to the government, remittances and foreign aid often go also to private agencies and individuals.

The underlying common denominator for most Middle Eastern countries, whether rentier or semi-rentier states, thus lies not with oil but with tax, or more exactly – direct taxation: its level and, more importantly, its proportion in state revenues. Comparing the effects of direct rents (in Saudi Arabia) with indirect rents (Yemen), during the oil price boom period, Chaudhry finds “one surprisingly similar effect on the two bureaucracies: in both countries the government abandoned its prior project of creating extractive institutions... Rulers, in fact, do not like to tax. If they can, they avoid them... amid this apparent burst of state-building, the most essential function of the modern state, its power to tax, declined.” Furthermore, the fact that direct rents were controlled by the state, while indirect rents (remittances) were mainly private, prescribed different venues of state-building and correspondingly different possibilities of coping with the bust period (more on this below).

“The revenue of the state is the state,” Edmund Burke once argued. Where citizens are not the resource for their state’s revenue they are also not the source of its legitimacy. Arab governments manage to sustain their authoritarian power partly by drawing most of their national revenues from without, rather than from tax-paying citizens within. In the Arab Middle East, only Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon extract substantial revenue (about 20-25%) from direct taxation, with an additional 50% coming from indirect taxes, compared with an OECD average of 40% and 50%, respectively. In non-Arab countries, Israel approaches the OECD average with 40% of state revenue coming from direct and 40% from indirect taxation; Iran is almost a paradigmatic rentier state, with tax revenue (both direct and indirect) accounting for little more than 5% of its GDP; Turkey is a case in-between (with 32.5% of GDP coming from overall tax revenue). Thus, in almost the entire Middle East direct taxation, namely mainly income tax, is virtually irrelevant to state revenue. Even non-OPEC Arab states, such as Egypt, Syria and Jordan, derive most of their revenue from remittances of workers in foreign (mainly oil-producing) countries, from indirect taxation levied on state-owned companies and foreign companies, or from foreign aid.
Foreign aid is especially important in the case of the Palestinians. In 2008 alone, the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank received $3 billion in foreign aid (mainly from UNRWA, the U.S. and the EU), out of which $1.8 billion went to the budget of the Palestinian Authority, another $700 million to specific programs, and $500 million to humanitarian assistance (mainly in Gaza). The donor countries have pledged to contribute $7.7 billion through 2010.\textsuperscript{54} NGOs have similarly supplied significant material aid. “In the five years following the Oslo Accord, the West Bank and Gaza received an enormous amount of donor assistance, averaging over $200 per capita per year, many times the level of official assistance to lower middle income countries or to other countries in the region.”\textsuperscript{55} Since then aid has risen to about $300 per person. Overall, “aid for the West Bank and Gaza appears to have been extremely generous.”\textsuperscript{56} This would seem to add the occupied territories to the Middle Eastern pattern of rentier or rentier-like polities. Alarmingly, trends in foreign aid exhibit a high correlation with trends in Palestinian violence, both inwards and outwards.\textsuperscript{57}

How does this heterogeneity (rent resources) within commonality (direct taxation share) bear upon rentierism capacity to fend off regime-change and democracy? Above all, it points to the need to clarify our questions. At the heart of most RST scholarship lies an apparent paradox: considering the proven high correlation between development and democracy,\textsuperscript{58} why have the Gulf States, with some of highest rates of GDP per capita in the world, not democratized? Indeed, none of OPEC states is a democracy. However, the same holds for the rest of the Arab countries. Herb thus examines “the counterfactual argument… If the gods of geology had not seen fit to put oil under the sands of Kuwait, it would be more democratic than in fact it is.”\textsuperscript{59} Would Kuwait be a democracy if it lacked oil? To answer this question, he argues, one need not compare Kuwait to Canada (as is usually the case with RST scholarship), but rather to Egypt or Yemen. This perspective stresses the role of regional religion (Islam) and regime (authoritarianism) alongside the level of development (poverty), in establishing the factors behind the democracy, or the lack thereof. Kuwait, sans oil, would still be non-democratic.

Herb is right in his criticism, but mistaken in his scholarly remedy. Since rentierism has, in its various forms, impacted the Middle East as a whole, Herb’s line of inquiry overlooks a more fundamental counterfactual question: would Jordan be a democracy, were it not for the oil of Kuwait, Iraq, etc.? Broadly phrased, would we have seen a greater tendency towards democracy in the Middle East had its governments lacked the capacity to sustain such a low proportion of direct taxation in state revenues?

Moreover, we must reemphasize that significant direct taxation is, at best, a necessary, not a sufficient, condition for democracy. “While the Middle East does not yet offer much support for the link between taxation and representation, it seems to confirm the negative side of that equation. Low levels of direct taxation have helped state elites in the Middle East avoid moves toward greater representation.”\textsuperscript{60} Basically amounting to the “no taxation, no representation” causation, the argument may be complemented by asserting that insignificant direct taxation is a sufficient, not necessary, condition for regime stability. Moreover, rentierism (derived from either natural
resources or foreign aid) “makes autocratic leaders more likely to concentrate power in their hands when they face a growing risk of revolution or mass opposition.”61 However, as we shall see, this stipulation is predicated on the second important qualification of RST, the rent trend.

Rent trend is essential for understanding the rentier state’s past and prospect. Prices of oil are not a constant but a variable. Rather than perceiving rentierism as a binary state (you either have or don’t have it), it is better to track down its dynamics. Recently, Thomas Friedman coined the “First Law of Petropolitics”, arguing that “the price of oil and the pace of freedom always move in opposite directions in oil-rich petrostate states.”62 Rentier authoritarianism is undermined when the price of oil falls, and vice versa – when oil price is high, democracy is sacrificed.

The argument, however, needs to be extended and nuanced. It is not merely democracy, but also regime stability that is affected by rent-trend. This is partly why oil-producing countries are neither bullet- nor ballot-proof; they are not immune to either democratization or to mass uprising and regime-change. True enough, in many cases rentier-based regimes draw on high oil revenues in preparation for a rainy day. Still, occasionally this is not enough. Such is the case of Iran, the study of which is where RST originated.63 The Iranian revolution started as a popular revolution and quickly drifted to substituting autocracy with theocracy. As the revolution illustrates, rentierism may bring about a widening gap between rich and poor, making the “hedonic treadmill” all the more frustrating, and the regime less legitimate. Coupled with a sharp decline in revenues, the government becomes more fragile and fearful, susceptible to mistakes, which may then bring about its demise.64 However, it does not necessarily follow that a democracy prevails in its wake. Indeed, rather than enhancing democracy, under certain circumstances (too) low rents may actually induce radical brinkmanship.

Furthermore, the rent-trend impact is often rather subtle. The Middle East saw a rather long period of low oil prices, from the mid 1980s until the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s. This coincided with the demise of the Cold War, which, by diminishing foreign (mostly Soviet) aid to oil-poor semi-rentier states, further exacerbated the financial burden on the latter. These trends did not result in regime change. Why? One answer is that rents were high enough in boom years to allow for regime survival in the bust periods. Coercive mechanisms, stable coalitions and a patrimonial mentality – all developed during times of high oil revenues, including the most recent (2003-2008) – supposedly provided Arab regimes with a reservoir of legitimacy for troubled times.

Certain adjustments, however, were made. The oil-rich countries had attempted to diversify their economies in order to reduce their overall dependence on oil. The result was limited at best, not least because the need was not urgent. Previous revenues and existent resources were generally sufficient for regime survival. While the less populated countries of the Gulf faced relatively few violent challenges, the war- and sanctions- struck Iraq and Iran were less fortunate.

Algeria is another case in point. Its “dependence on oil rent adversely affected social and political development, such that, in the wake of the crash in oil prices in 1986, Algeria's political
consensus broke down as a small elite with a vested interest in the status quo found itself isolated from the mass of the population. The animosity between regime and population became apparent in the Islamic Salvation Front’s victory in the first round of the 1991 elections. A violent civil war ensued, curtailed by the rent-financed coercive apparatus. More recently, capitalizing on the 2006-2008 oil prices surge, Algeria has almost completely eliminated its gigantic foreign debt. Much of the rents, however, have been allocated to securing Bouteflika’s regime by tackling soaring inflation and unemployment with increased subsidies.

The semi-rentier states faced a more intricate challenge. Sustaining the regime-defending and fending-off-democracy policies of low taxation with high welfare and subsidies became an increasingly daunting task. Initially resorting to external borrowing on international capital markets, semi-rentier governments soon accumulated unsustainable levels of external debt. They were thus forced to turn to the Bretton Woods institutions, the hub of the neo-liberal “Washington Consensus.” Herein lay the greatest hurdle, since these institutions called for a “standard” reform package, prescribing a transformative structural change that the governments refuse to entertain. Arab regimes “did not follow an economic logic of enhancing efficiency and productivity, but a political logic of regime maintenance that was enshrined as the top priority in economic policy.” This resulted in greatly diminished economic reforms. These have somewhat altered the structure of state revenues, but effectively kept the neopatrimonial patterns of socio-political relations intact, albeit now with greater emphasis on private big business interests. In sum, politically, Arab regimes have managed to ward off threats of regime stability or of genuine democratization during the rents bust period; economically, however, they have not managed to leverage those years for profound economic reforms that would enable them to better handle future crises.

It is against this backdrop that one needs to assess the challenge posed to the Middle Eastern rentier states by the global economic crisis. It is hard to foretell the depth and length of the financial calamity, purportedly the worst since the Great Depression, or to predict the appearance of alternative energy sources for transportation, which currently accounts for 70% of oil consumption. At any rate, eroded and perforated, the bullet- and ballot-proof rentier vest is unlikely to endure another major blow. Rents (oil-based or otherwise) still provide an invaluable portion of most Middle Eastern countries’ revenues. Persistent low oil prices as well as the reluctance of foreign states and international organizations (which, unlike the 1990s, likewise suffer from the crisis) to fill the financial gap, could bring certain regimes to the brink of bankruptcy. Moderate regimes may trust U.S. support to sustain rentierism, but the new administration will have to carefully assess to what degree it can buy enough time for the regime, while the population within grows evermore hostile towards both its rulers and their external providers.

One country in which a critical mass of economic misfortune may damage rentierism enough to topple a regime and, perhaps, facilitate democracy, is Iran. This, of course, may in turn induce a boom in oil prices, but, as the first Iranian revolution proved, it may very well be too late. Contra to Ahmadinejad’s assertion in early December 2008, that “there is almost a zero percent possibility for our economy to be affected by this [global economic crisis],” the Iranian rentier
state is in dire straits. Already in August 2008, the International Monetary Fund warned that “medium-term prospects are very sensitive to the oil price assumptions,” projecting, that “if oil prices for Iranian crude fell to $75 per barrel, the country would register current account deficits in the medium term, which would be unsustainable because of Iran’s limited access to international financial markets.” Ahmadinejad’s populist handling of the “Oil Stabilization Fund” (resulting, inter alia, in more than doubling the inflation from 10% in 2005/6 to 24% in 2008) made Iran all the more vulnerable to the drop in oil prices. The new plan to eliminate subsidies and raise taxes on goods will significantly hurt “two of the pillars of the conservative political base: the lower classes and the religious conservative Baazari-merchant community.” Already in October, with the oil price dropping to $80 a barrel, an attempt to levy a 3% VAT resulted in mass protests and strikes; eventually, Ahmadinejad backed down, pledging to delay the imposition for a year. Iran, it is worth noting again, is not alone in its fragile position facing current economic trends. Time will tell if the “curse of the black gold” will cast its spell.

Military Nuclearization

Concluding with the prospect of military nuclearization, the combined effects of the first two vectors acquire apocalyptic proportions. The gravest Middle Eastern “known unknown”, the Iranian advance towards nuclear weapons, will dictate much of the region’s future trajectories, the pun – unfortunately – intended. Iranian spokesmen have repeatedly dismissed the possibility of suspending the uranium enrichment program. However, even so, Iran may (and may be allowed to) follow the Japanese path, developing full nuclear capacity, short of possessing or manufacturing a bomb. As for the International Atomic Energy Agency, its director-general, Mohamed ElBaradei, said that “we haven't really moved one inch toward addressing the issues,” concluding “I think so far the policy has been a failure.” In the 2008 AAPOP, 44% regarded positively Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons (notably 73% in Saudi Arabia), while only 29% deemed it negatively.

Whether Iran will get the bomb in two or ten years is important, of course, but of no less significance is whether Israel can destroy the Iranian nuclear project. Former Israeli National Security Council Chairman Giora Eiland warned against an Israeli strike in Iran, saying that Israel “cannot defeat Iran,” adding that an Israeli military operation or aerial strike cannot force Iran to capitulate or end its nuclear development efforts. However, if Eiland is mistaken (or misleading), and the new Israeli government believes it is capable of a successful attack, and both negotiations and US-led intervention become irrelevant, Israel will almost certainly act. If Eiland is right, the Middle East faces a nuclear balance of terror, quite literally this time around. In both cases, the ramifications are immense.

Left to its own devices, Israel will likely turn to Dimona. Conventional weaponry (including weapons) will probably be ineffective, or at least highly uncertain, in putting an end to Iran's nuclear project. The alternative is the use of bunker-busting nuclear weapons (aka earth-penetrating weapons), exploding deep underground to reduce the risk of radioactive fallout. “As soon as the
green light is given, it will be one mission, one strike and the Iranian nuclear project will be demolished,” said one of The Sunday Times sources two years ago. According to the report, attacking three main sites (in Natanz, near Isfahan and in Arak), “would delay Iran’s nuclear programme indefinitely.” Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak recently warned that if Iran acquires a nuclear weapon, it could try to attack the United States, “Iran would not hesitate to load it on a ship, arm it with a detonator operated by GPS and sail it into a vital port on the east coast of North America.” Indicating the possibility of a military strike, Barak said, “We recommend to the world not to take any option off the table, and we mean what we say.” Is an Israeli preemptive attack just? This will be the debate of men of the pen. Some will consider the following words delivered in 2001 by Rafsanjani, who warned that if Muslims possessed nuclear weapons, “the use of even one nuclear bomb in Israel will destroy everything, whereas it will only harm the Islamic world.”

If Iran is allowed to obtain nuclear weapons, it is unreasonable to expect an Iranian nuclear attack on Israel, considering the latter's second-strike capabilities. It is equally unreasonable to presume the continued existence of Israel as such. Sans peace and boosted by an Iranian bomb, anti-Israeli terror will be on the rise with diminished Israeli capability to respond. As several public opinion polls reveal, many Israeli Jews will then opt to immigrate; most of them belong to the wealthier, educated segments of the Jewish community. Thus, for example, in a 2006 survey among Israeli (both Jews and non-Jews) respondents, 54% defined Iran as „Israel‟s most dangerous enemy” (only 8% said it about the Palestinians). Another poll indicated that 79% were certain that Iran would obtain nuclear weapons, while 66% believed that it would use them to annihilate Israel. One out of four said he/she would consider leaving Israel if Iran becomes nuclear. There may be little need for nuclear fallout to bring about the demise of the Jewish state.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper aspires to encourage, not to discourage, change. The magnitude and direction of the three vectors are alarming, but it is precisely this prospect of potential cataclysm that calls for urgent action. In this paper I have argued that three powerful trends are currently converging in the Middle East: first, this year the region will witness more free and fair elections than ever before. This, however, far from suggesting a period of peace and security, is more likely to trigger the opposite. In Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and Iran general elections will likely bring about greater political radicalization, not only in the possible wake of hard-liners‟ victories, but also in the preceding campaigns. This radicalization would increase the chances of the eruption of violence. This predicament illustrates the need to transcend the facile understanding of the democratic peace thesis, emphasizing that (1) democratizing polities are, in fact, more prone to violence, than both fully democratic and authoritarian regimes; and (2) the thesis addresses mainly inter-state relations, and tells little of intercommunal conflicts, which are as, or more prevalent in the Middle East than elsewhere.
Second, I have argued that the global economic crisis challenges the rentier Middle Eastern state. Rather than providing the authoritarian government with a ballot- and bullet-proof vest, rentierism is in fact currently more fragile than ever before. I have emphasized that the rentier state is not uniform and static, but a heterogeneous and dynamic polity: rents extend beyond the role of oil, and rent trends may facilitate political, not only economic, turmoil. Third, I have briefly expounded the core of the nuclearization question, arguing that unless promptly addressed, it may bring about, in the long run, the demise of Israel, utterly altering the geopolitics of the Middle East.

It is of little use and wisdom to prophesy about the lands of prophets, and this analysis obviously does not exhaust the apocalyptic potential of the region. More can be said about the various “known unknown” variables, and there is much to speculate on concerning the “unknown unknowns.” Political assassinations, to take one notable scenario, may bring about highly unpredictable changes. Large-scale or symbolic terror attacks, such as bombing the Temple Mount, may likewise bring on doomsday. Peace and apocalypse, however, are interconnected vessels. Working wisely for the former will diminish the likelihood of the latter.

A final theoretical note is due. This paper hints at the possibility of integrating refined versions of DPT and RST. A possible point of departure for such an undertaking is the hypothesis that rentierism and electoral radicalism are potentially mutually reinforcing. First, radicalism makes good rents. Since rent trends are especially susceptible to political developments, radicalism may be perceived as a means to turn bust into boom, to increase oil prices by making politics volatile and violent. This applies not only to the parties directly involved in conflict, but also to governments which may indirectly influence the conflict while directly gaining from high oil/gas prices. Russia is a case in point. Under Putin, whose kandidat dissertation advocates extensive governmental control over natural resource, Russia has shifted from “rentier oligarchy,” where rents are held by private capitalists, into a semi-rentier state. Concomitantly, Russian reliance on exports of natural resources has increased from two-thirds (in 1998) to more than three-quarters (in 2005), accounting for about 60% of federal revenues. Faced with dwindling oil prices, the Russian government may opt for a conflictual foreign policy, where energy matters (gas with respect to Georgia and the Ukraine; oil with respect to Iran), and when risks seem acceptable.

Second, rentierism provides for an ethical-political divorce between the state and the street. Undermining the taxation-representation linkage, it induces both the government and the public to shed political responsibility, read accountability. While the government is not accountable to the public will, the public is not accountable for the government’s policy. This deforms the state in a way that renders the strong–weak continuum irrelevant. The rentier state is neither inherently weak nor strong; it is different. Rather than following Weberian “politics as a vocation” it fosters a Schmittian “concept of the political.” The state authority is derived less from traditional, charismatic or legal sources of legitimacy, and draws more on its rent resources and the ability to project a reliable image of enmity, from both within and without (in the Middle East, mostly Israel and the U.S.). Here electoralism comes in handy, since it creates an authorized public space for a heated discourse of hate. Radicalism is thus called on to fill the gap between the state and the street.
In sum, the Middle East’s two vicious vectors may also create a vicious circle of rentierism and radicalism.

Endnotes


Ephraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann, *War and Peace Index* (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 2008).


Yaar and Hermann, *War and Peace Index*.


Yaar and Hermann, *War and Peace Index*.

A quarterly poll carried out by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR-Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 30, 3-5 December 2008).


This argument naturally requires further exploration, which extends beyond the scope of this paper. On the saliency of pan-Arab identity in the Middle East see, for example, Peter A. Furia

40 In examining the different effects of elections on democratization in Egypt, Malaysia, Iran and the Philippines, Brownlee (Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) identifies ruling parties that contain elite conflict as the main source of authoritarian stability, allowing dictators to tighten their holds using elections as a safety valve.


43 *The Jerusalem Post*, Jan 6, 2009.


50 Hence the importance of the case of Norway, the world’s third-largest oil exporter, that strictly adheres to high direct taxation.


60 Steven Heydemann, "War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East," in Steven Heydemann ed., War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 25.


66 Schlumberger, "Rents, Reform, and Authoritarianism in the Middle East," at 47.

67 Cited in Brandon Friedman, The Islamic Republic of Iran Tackles Subsidies as the Price of Oil Declines, Iran Pulse No.27 (Tel Aviv: The Center for Iranian studies, Tel Aviv University 2009), 2.


69 Friedman, The Islamic Republic of Iran Tackles Subsidies as the Price of Oil Declines, Iran Pulse No.27, 3.


75 *AP*, Dec 17, 2008.

76 Cited in Menashri, "Iran, Israel and the Middle East Conflict," at 118.

77 *Maariv*, October 1, 2006.

78 *Maariv*, November 24, 2006.

