



Democracy Is Impossible

Throughout most of mankind's history, personal liberty, private property rights and rule of law have always won a hostile reception. There's little older in most of human history than: the notion that a few people are to give orders while others obey those orders; the political leadership classes are exempt from laws that the masses are obliged to heed; and the rights of individuals are only secondary to the rights of the state. The exception to this vision feebly emerged in the West, mainly in England, in 1215 with the Magna Carta, a charter that limited the power of the king and required him to proclaim and recognize the liberties of English subjects.



The Magna Carta served as inspiration for other instruments of personal liberty, such as habeas corpus and bills of rights, and five centuries later served as inspiration for the U.S. Constitution. The ideas of liberty and limited government were cultivated by great British philosophers — such as Francis Bacon, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and David Hume — and on the Continent by the likes of Baron de Montesquieu, Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Through the works of Western philosophers and the politicians influenced by them, including the founders of our nation, the idea emerged that political leaders couldn't run roughshod over the common man.

The key point to recognize is that Western transition from barbarism to civility didn't take place overnight; it took centuries. More importantly, for the most part Western civility and its institutions were not transplanted; they emerged from within Western civilization. Where they were successfully transplanted, it was done through Western colonialism, such as in the cases of the U.S., Canada and Australia.

In Libya and most other countries in the Arab world, what we know as personal liberty is nonexistent. According to Freedom House's 2011 "Freedom in the World" survey, as well as Amnesty International's annual report for 2011, most North African and Middle Eastern countries are ranked either "repressive" or "not free." Moreover, I believe that there's little prospect for Arabs ever being free and that Western encouragement and hopes for democracy are doomed to failure and disappointment. Most nations in the Middle East do not share the philosophical foundations of the West. It's not likely liberty-oriented values will ever emerge in cultures that have disdain for the rule of law and private property rights and that sanction barbaric practices such as the stoning of women for adultery, the severing of hands or beheading as a form of punishment, and imprisonment for criticizing or speaking ill of the government.

What should the West do about the gross violations of human rights so prevalent in North Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere? My short answer is to mind our own business. The only case in which we should interfere with Middle Eastern affairs is when our national defense or economic interests are



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directly threatened. That is, for example, if Iran were to meddle with Middle Eastern oil shipments or if we discovered good evidence of its building nuclear weapons, then we should militarily intervene. What they want to do to one another is none of our business.

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