

Commentary on Amitai Etzioni's article "The Democratisation Mirage" [October 30, 2015]

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Etzioni's advice regarding US foreign policy integrates realist and idealist approaches. From the perspective of Realpolitik, he recommends that the US focus on the pursuit of its core interests, the heart of which is US security and among which is not absolutist support of democratization abroad. From the Idealist perspective, he urges US support and encouragement of humanitarian efforts. Etzioni argues that some nations are more ready for democratization than others. The felicitous phrase he uses is "nations which are sociologically under-prepared [for democratization]..." (p. 140). Etzioni argues that the US foreign policy must be attuned to this reality. US interest would not be well-served by intrusive and aggressive pursuit of democratization in some parts of the world; tolerance of authoritarian governments would serve US interests better. Some people prefer order in an authoritarian society over freedom in an anarchical society (p. 147). Etzioni not need to state the obvious point: Those people may have made the right choice (see Etzioni's discussion of Saudi Arabia and Yemen, pp. 148 & 149).

Etzioni does not argue that the US should be insensitive to, or unaware of, democratization in other parts of the world. He does point out that becoming a democracy can take a long time and depends upon much. Etzioni states that "The extensive scholarship on democratisation [sic] shows that its success requires both constituting factors and facilitating conditions" (p. 140). The lists are provided on p. 141. However, it is (in my opinion) too much to assume that all the characteristics on those lists must be in place before a country can

democratize. Because the lists are so comprehensive, I believe it would be more accurate to view these lists as characteristics of what constitutes democracy. If my sense of this is correct, then analysts, policymakers, and others should think of methods that could be used to tell whether there is some optimal minimum combination of characteristics that need to be in place, whether the characteristics must unfold in a particular order, and whether some characteristics are more essential than others. With regard to the first and second, my sense is that the combination and order will be dictated by the nation in question – its history, culture, economy, etc. Etzioni's discussion of Britain, the US, Germany, Japan, Iraq, and Afghanistan, to mention a few, seems to support this position. With regard to the third, I suspect literacy and a free press are among the most essential characteristics.

More could be said about the article. For the sake of brevity I will touch on three other parts of his argument: first, the use of military force; second, mass protests; and third, universal application of his analytical framework. I will then end this commentary with a suggestion. About the use of military force: Etzioni believes that neither strategic nor tactical planning should completely eliminate large-scale military operations as a tool in national policy. Military operations can and should be used to accomplish goals other than democratization - national security, for example (pp. 143-145, 147; see also his recommendations regarding the US response to ISIS on p. 150 and his discussion of the US defense of European members of NATO on pp. 153 & 154). Second, Etzioni points out that the US has a penchant for supporting mass movements: these movements are seen as pro-democracy movements (a more generous view is that mass movements are portrayed as pro-democracy movements for the sake of domestic and foreign consumption). He argues that 'successful' mass protests have led to

authoritarianism, not democracy (p. 146; see also p. 147). The US should assist with humanitarian efforts. It should not actively and aggressively foment internal support of one group at the expense of another. Third, Etzioni's analytical framework, as applied to Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, yields important insights. I encourage the application of his analytical framework to US relations with countries in Southeast Asia (including China), Central America, and South America.

Finally, a suggestion. Etzioni's article has a bold, even provocative, beginning: lives lost fighting for democracy in some places (Vietnam is one of his examples) have been in vain. I understand the importance of a powerful introduction, and I appreciate the boldness, but wonder if his introduction is so provocative as to predispose readers against the argument that follows. Perhaps his argument would be better served if his introduction had less sting. It would be a shame if readers did not make it past the introduction.

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Good morning-

Thank you for the chance to read and comment of this article. It's been useful for me, and I'd like permission to recommend it to my students, as well. For example, the clear-eyed observation that removing authoritarian structures is not enough to create or sustain democracy is a worthwhile concern for any future leader in the

senior ranks of military or political service. Policy makers would be wise to understand and accept the constituting factors and facilitating conditions Dr. Etzioni explains so well. While this article does not- and no article could- capture a recipe for success, Dr. Etzioni does an excellent job of analyzing the ingredients of a nation-building strategy with a chance of success. Recommendations in the article are realistic and well-supported, linked to a network of other research in support of practical policy actions.

The only thing that I'd very much like to see is a slightly updated version, taking into account increased US boots-on-the-ground military activity, and the final state of the JCPOA with Iran regarding nuclear capabilities. I hope that Dr. Etzioni continues to keep an eye on the progress of strategic actions in this area, and offer further insight as events develop. Thank you again for the chance to read over and comment on the article.

V/R,

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