

Israel's fight as a democracy against autocratic regimes in the Middle East

Ehud Eilam

(Senior fellow with the Gold Institute for International Strategy. He has been dealing and studying Israel's national security for more than 25 years. He served in the Israeli military and later on he worked for the Israeli Ministry of Defense)

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Israel has a system of government that is based on parliamentary democracy. Israel is about to have its third election in less than a year. It could be seen a sign of problem in Israel's democracy. There are other troubles that indicate on cracks in this relatively young democracy. Yet since Israel was established, in 1948, it was always a democracy and it managed to stay one over the years. In spite of all its enormous challenges, the social, economic and above all the security ones Israel continued to be a democracy. The existential threat to Israel could have been used as an excuse to replacing democracy with an autocratic regime, where a powerful leader can do what is needed in order to protect the country. However Israel did not fall into this trap.

The IDF has a dominant rule in the decision making in Israel. There have been also all kinds of aspects of militarization in Israel. The Israelis take it for granted as it was a normal situation for any country. One known example is the prestige of senior military officers that serves them often as a springboard to a carrier in politics. In spite of all that Israelis are loyal to their democratic system.

Arab states always have some kind of autocratic regime, a religious, secular one or kind of a mix between them. The Arab president or king rules the country usually with an iron fist because without it he fears he will not survive. Arab states had adopted and developed over the years certain democratic aspects but it was clear they still have an autocratic regime. It was certainly true with states that led the conflict against Israel: Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq.

Arab states enjoy overwhelming advantages in regard to Israel, mostly in the size of territory, population and of course their vast natural resources. It could be believed that a combination between those huge advantages and a strong autocratic regime should have been enough to defeat the IDF and to destroy Israel. Yet it was not. The much smaller Israel won wars not in spite but because of its democracy. In recent decades Israel has a conflict with the autocratic regime in Iran. Israel's old struggle with the Arabs and the new one with Iran could be compared to other cases.

Prof. Matthew Kroenig teaches in Georgetown University in Washington DC. He is an expert to American foreign policy who used to work for the US government. His upcoming book is "The Return of Great Power Rivalry: Democracy versus Autocracy from the Ancient World to the U.S. and China." <https://www.amazon.com/Return-Great-Power-Rivalry-Democracy/dp/0190080248>

In his intriguing and important book Kroenig examines the fight between democracies and autocratic regimes. "He contends that democracies actually have unique economic, diplomatic, and military advantages in long-run geopolitical competitions. He considers autocratic advantages as well, but shows that these are more than outweighed by their vulnerabilities. Kroenig then shows these arguments through the seven most important cases of democratic-versus-autocratic rivalries throughout history, from the ancient world to the Cold War."

Israel always studied from the experience of other states. Kroenig's new captivating book carries with it highly valuable lessons that could help the Israeli democracy in confronting both Arabs and Iran.