

# Gambling with History: The Making of a Democratic Iraq

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*If we think there is a fast solution to changing the governance of Iraq, then we don't understand history... God help us if we think this transition will occur easily.*

—General (retired) Anthony Zinni, former Commander US Central Command<sup>1</sup>

*Democracy in Iraq—everyone talks about it, but no one knows what it means.*

—Anonymous Shia in focus group session, Sadr City, Baghdad<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

The United States finds itself at a critical moment in its history of US-Arab relations, and indeed, in US-Islamic relations. The US has endeavored to change the status quo of Iraq, and in doing so, it will most likely affect the status quo of the entire Arab world. What remains in the balance is whether that change in the current situation will enhance US interests or threaten them for many years to come. Considering the liberation of Iraq, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice underlines the great opportunity towards stability in the Middle East and increased security throughout the world, “much as a democratic Germany became a linchpin of a new Europe” at the end of World War II.<sup>3</sup>

Should the US succeed in creating a recognizable form of democracy, there is significant potential for that to act as an impetus in the region over the coming decades. While this will probably not be in the form of a rapid fall of Arab authoritarian regimes replaced by democratic regimes as in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, there are already signs of at least some opening and reform as a result of the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.<sup>4</sup> This will likely continue in a slow and gradual process leading towards more democratization and freedom in the Arab world.

In contrast, should the US fail, or be perceived to fail, and most notably, pull out of Iraq, a dangerous precedent will be set in regards to the United States' preeminent position in the world today. Having invaded and occupied Iraq promising liberation and democracy, a withdrawal would significantly demonstrate a lack of resolve on the United States' part and its capability to again posture itself as “the light upon the hill” would be significantly degraded. In the past, the

US has already appeared weak in the region after pulling out of locations such as Somalia and Lebanon, giving its enemies motivation to depict it as a “paper tiger.” Fareed Zakaria states,

Failure in Iraq would be a monumental loss for America’s role in the world. Washington will have created instability in the heart of the oil-producing world, weakened America’s ability to push for change in the Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran and Syria, and given comfort to its foes. The old order will rejoice and the Middle East would return to its stagnant and self-destructive ways.<sup>5</sup>

The road to democracy in Iraq will not be easy. Toby Dodge writes, “for US forces currently attempting to reform Iraq’s political structures, the libraries are hardly full of useful reference books.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Iraq does not have many of what are considered the requirements for a viable democracy. For one, Saddam Hussein’s regime certainly did not have respect for private property rights, often seen as a prerequisite for constitutional liberalism.<sup>7</sup> The middle class has been decimated by sanctions and misrule by the old regime, and professionalism and meritocracy have suffered greatly as well.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, rule of law must be established,<sup>9</sup> as Saddam Hussein and his henchmen hardly set a precedent for it. Thus, Iraq will have to develop a legal system to include a government “capable of protecting property rights and human rights, press freedoms and business contracts, antitrust laws and consumer demand.”<sup>10</sup>

Certainly the more conservative Arab regimes are anxious to return to the status quo of an Iraq led by an authoritarian leader. A failure of democracy to take hold in Iraq would provide Arab autocratic and liberal autocratic regimes fodder to justify to their constituents why furthering democratic principles in these countries is not in the public’s best interest.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, an Iraqi government prematurely left too early to its own devices will likely break down into sectarianism, tribalism, and even warlordism.

In spite of a push by France and some members of the UN Security Council for more authority, many within Iraq and in both the US and Iraqi governments recognize that the country will not be ready for complete self-governance for at least a couple of years. As Fouad Ajami points out,

Nor is it a mystery that Syria and Iran thirst for America’s defeat in Iraq. The power that blew into Baghdad came bearing the promise of a new order. Woven into the awesome victory were hopes for reform, some perhaps extravagant. There would rise in Mesopotamia a state more democratic, more secular, no doubt more prosperous, than much of the neighborhood. That state would be weaned from the false temptations of Arab radicalism. Without quite fully appreciating it, we had announced nothing less than the obsolescence of the region’s ruling order.<sup>12</sup>

During his visit to Baghdad in September 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell commented on maintaining a measured timetable, lest Iraq not achieve democracy. He noted that there had to be a deliberate process to establish the institutions of government. As he stated in a press conference:

We're not hanging on for the sake of hanging on. We're hanging on because it's necessary to stay with this task until a new government has been created—a responsible government. The worst thing that could happen is for us to push this too quickly—before the capacity for governance is there and the basis for legitimacy is there—and see it fail.<sup>13</sup>

## **Scope of this paper**

Recognizing the importance of the United States succeeding in Iraq, this paper looks into how to create good governance in that country and how success in this endeavor could eventually be measured. Realizing the situation on the ground seems to change not only daily, but from news report to news report, our research does not necessarily offer prescriptions for the coming 3-6 months. Rather, it assumes a semblance of law and order continues to be established during that time. It also assumes the United States will not suddenly back down on its policy of establishing a democratic Iraq with a viable economy and respect for civil liberties after the 30 June 2004 official end of the occupation.<sup>14</sup>

Our paper first focuses on what constitutes democracy in Iraq; how should it be defined? Next, we consider short-term benchmarks on the road to a democratic regime and then move to what a future Iraqi democracy might look like. Interest groups are especially important in guaranteeing the success of democracy, and so we take into account Islamic factions as well as ethnic minorities as shapers of the future Iraqi government. Likely obstacles to success and how one can define long-term success in this US experiment in bolstering an Arab democracy are also discussed; and finally, we offer our recommendations for US policy to the Department of Defense and Department of State administrators in Iraq.

## **What is Democracy in Iraq?**

As the old saying goes: “If you don't know where you're going, it doesn't matter how you get there.” The same will hold true for establishing democracy in Iraq—if one does not define what democracy in Iraq means, then it will not matter much how the US measures success. Moreover, as numerous politicians and scholars have stated, in the end, the Iraqis must create their constitution and define their democracy in their own way. Nonetheless, at the root of all definitions of democracy “lies the idea of popular power, of a situation in which power, and perhaps authority too, rests with the people.”<sup>15</sup> Still, this is a minimalist definition, and if left at this level, scholar Amin Saikal claims that “a wide range of authoritarian systems” can be justified.<sup>16</sup> More importantly, political scientists Philippe Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl add that political democracy is “a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives.”<sup>17</sup> To operate properly, the system of governance must be institutionalized and “habitually known, practiced, and accepted by most, if not all, actors.”<sup>18</sup> In the Iraqi case, a system must be institutionalized in a constitution and the laws that will be derived from it. After establishing a constitutional foundation, a democracy will find a way to hold the rulers of that state accountable for their actions.<sup>19</sup>

To make this happen, scholar Leszek Kolakowski argues democracy must have three components. First, it must have, “a set of institutions aimed at assuring that the power and influence of political elites correspond to the amount of popular support they enjoy.” Second, the system must have an independent legal system separate from the executive power and the law must “act as an autonomous mediating device between individual or corporate interest and the state,” not as “an instrument of ruling elites.” Finally, the system must have “enforceable barriers built into the legal system that guarantee both the equality of all citizens before the law and basic personal rights which include freedom of movement, freedom of speech, freedom of association, religious freedom, and freedom to acquire property.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, regardless of the ultimate form of government, the above three criteria provide a basic benchmark for defining democracy.

At any rate, one should heed a reminder of what to expect as Iraq develops its democratic institutions. “Democratization will not necessarily bring in its wake economic growth, social peace, administrative efficiency, political harmony, free markets, or ‘the end of ideology.’”<sup>21</sup> There is no absolute guarantee.

### **Short Term Measures of Success**

Short term measures of success are fairly easily defined. We will borrow from the standards expounded by Alina Romanowski, Director of the Middle East Partnership Initiative and founding director of the Near-East and South Asia Center for Strategic Studies at the National Defense University.<sup>22</sup>

First, the Iraqis must increase governance of themselves. As Judith Yaphe, a Senior Research Fellow at National Defense University has stated, Iraqis need to see Iraqis running things. This is already unhurriedly taking place as the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) involves the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) in decision-making processes at increased levels. Closely related is the drafting of an Iraqi constitution. While the United States can continue to encourage, guide, motivate, and cajole the future constitutional convention to allow for modification as the vision Iraqis have of democracy changes over time, in the end, only the Iraqis themselves can create a constitution that they will finally acknowledge and live with.

Important to the success of this constitution is achieving buy-in by the Iraqi population. This means more than a mere vote of acceptance. First, the new document must be a constitution the people understand from an organization they view as legitimate. Currently, the limited data suggests the IGC is doing a poor job of communicating with their constituents. As focus groups in June and July 2003 demonstrated, the IGC and the CPA are still seen as making decisions in the dark.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the IGC must show prudence in dealing with the media. After years of Saddam’s propaganda, few Iraqis believe their local media. Rather, those with access tend to focus on media outside Iraq, such as al-Jazeera or al-Arabiya.<sup>24</sup> Thus, a media-based strategy will need a two-fold approach. First, the government must put more effort into improving the quality of its media coverage within Iraq, gradually convincing Iraqis that local broadcasts are more than just propaganda pieces. Second, the IGC must redouble their efforts to gain access to the Arab-wide broadcasts.<sup>25</sup> This may also provide other Arab citizens an ongoing model of democratization as they too tune into al-Jazeera. However, given the discord between the IGC and Arab media organizations, this will most likely be quite challenging.

Next the constitutional convention must couch the concepts of democracy in terms local Iraqis understand. Islamic terms such as *majlis* (in more modern terms, a consultative body) have a valuable role in expressing democratic concepts in a language most Iraqis will understand.<sup>26</sup> Many Iraqis have expressed that while they have a favorable impression of democracy, they are not exactly certain about what some words mean, other than a vague notion of participation or civil rights.<sup>27</sup> Using Islamic references will help to convince Iraqis that a new constitution is in line with Islamic values rather than an imitation of a Western form. As discussed later in this paper, while most experts and the available data agree that many Iraqis do not want an Islamic government based on the Iranian or Saudi Arabian models, they do want a government based on “Islamic values.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, most concerns about democracy come from fears that Iraq will have Western values imposed on it.<sup>29</sup> In sum, Iraqis must be assured of two things. First, the Iraqi people must be made to understand that their constitution is not a carbon copy of the US or another Western Constitution, and therefore, those Western concepts feared by many, such as the perceived break down of families or the promiscuity of women, will not follow as a consequence. Second, as this constitution has been created within the guide of Iraqi/Islamic values, it must also be a constitution with civil liberties, justice, and protection of the poor, and thus, in line with Islam, not an anathema to it.

As a fourth step is the creation of the Iraqi Transitional National Assembly (TNA), currently schedule to assume control of Iraq on 30 June 2004. In particular, we support the controversial agreement that delegates be selected via local caucuses in the 18 Iraqi governates (or provinces), rather than via direct election by Iraqis. Along with running the country (although to what extent still remains to be seen), the TNA will also have the critical job of appointing the committee to draft the future Iraqi constitution for a March 2005 vote by all Iraqi citizens.<sup>30</sup> As will be expounded upon later in this paper, should the TNA be directly elected, as Shia clerics such as Ayatollah Sistani advocate, the Shia,<sup>31</sup> given their sheer population numbers, would dominate this council. Moreover, as religious groups are currently some of the most organized groups in Iraq, there is a strong likelihood the council would display stronger Islamic ideals than the population at large, not to mention discounting other religious groups such as Christians. Thus, caucuses are the most advantageous means of ensuring adequate representation on the future transitional councils and the constitutional committee, not only in terms of the Shia-Sunni-Kurd ethnic and religious split, but also in terms of more secular versus more religious philosophies of governance.

Most importantly—and running concurrently with the previous four benchmarks—will be rebuilding and reconstructing the plundered Iraqi economy. The American chief civilian administrator in Iraq, L. Paul Bremer III, outlined the first of many difficulties involved in economic rebuilding—encouraging the private sector, especially small and medium-sized companies. The government must also reduce subsidies to state-owned firms and establish a transparent commercial code. Bremer states, “Following a disciplined, market-based approach will require difficult decisions and entail near-term sacrifices. For this program to be successful, it must be endorsed by the Iraqi people. But higher living standards—and political freedom—cannot emerge if economic freedom is denied.”<sup>32</sup> Short-term reference points such as a decreasing unemployment rate and greater purchasing power for luxuries by the middle class are quantifiable measures of US success.

## The Future Form of an Iraqi Government

If creating a constitution is a short-term benchmark, what form of government should the Iraqi people expect to reach in the long run? One critical issue will be how to ensure different groups are represented in a newly democratic country, while ensuring that sectarian conflicts are not exacerbated in the process. As Daniel Brumberg, a visiting professor at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, states, it is possible that, given the strong sectarian voting patterns, a Shia will always be elected as the chief executive of a democratic Iraq. Therefore, it would be easy for Sunni and Kurdish groups to feel marginalized. In a worst case scenario, if sufficient agreement were made between various Shia factions, democracy could eventually be used to oppress minority groups in Iraq.

One way to mitigate this is via federalism. Many authorities, including Adeed and Karen Dawisha writing in *Foreign Affairs*, along with Brumberg, recommend implementing federalism in the current 18 provinces.<sup>33</sup> In the case of Brumberg, he sees a sort of “United States of Iraq.” Not only would this force different sectarian groups to work together on a regional level and assure minority groups a greater voice in at least regional government, but it might also divert Iraqis from tribalism.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, it will inherently be part of a checks and balances system for Iraq.<sup>35</sup> However, lines will have to be carefully drawn in regards to what belongs to the realm of the national government versus regional and local governments. Following these considerations, a parliamentary form of government appears to be a better option for Iraq than a presidential system. Parliamentary forms of government are usually considered more unified and decisive, making it a good fit for newly democratic countries evolving from undemocratic regimes.

Still, in addition to a prime minister, some form of weak presidency, elected directly by the people, is also considered critical as a check on the power of a prime minister, in order to avoid the type of “creeping authoritarianism” that occurred elsewhere.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, “splitting the executive between a weak president and a prime minister has a better chance of sustaining democracy in Iraq” because it will encourage “political dueling to take place” in government chambers as opposed to on the “Iraqi street.” The President’s role would allow him to serve as a “symbolic figurehead” to the Iraqi people.<sup>37</sup>

A moderated proportional system, along the lines of Germany, may be appropriate for Iraq.<sup>38</sup> Since the 1950s, the lower house of the German legislative branch, the Bundestag, has imposed a 5 percent minimum vote for a party nationwide in order to be represented there. This minimum has been credited with Germany only having three main parties through most of its history, and rarely having more than five parties represented at any one time.<sup>39</sup> This is in contrast to the proportional representation (PR) system of Israel, which only requires a threshold of 1.5 percent to win a seat in the Knesset. The low Israeli threshold allows very small, extremist parties to enter the Knesset, and often prevents the larger parties from winning an absolute majority, forcing them to cobble together unstable coalitions with small parties, thus giving inordinate influence to the extremists.<sup>40</sup> The specific thresholds for proportional representation require more study.

Additionally, a moderate version of PR may encourage a careful balance between having too many versus too few parties. Fortunately, given the three major sectarian differences (and a

seemingly infinite number of tribal differences) between Sunni, Shia, and Kurds, a two-party, winner-take-all system is unlikely to develop. However, as has been greatly demonstrated over the past months, none of these groups are monolithic. Rather, there is a great deal of differentiation between them; some already active as formal parties, such as Da'wa, while others are tied to various more informal affiliations, such as groupings of Shia surrounding certain clerics. Iraq has the possibility of splitting into innumerable tiny parties unable to wield much power unless collected into unwieldy coalition governments. Thus, a PR system with a sufficient threshold for governance may encourage few larger parties to develop. They would be large enough to ensure significant differentiation and to bar an all-encompassing Shia party from assuming control of nearly all politics in Iraq through the sheer number of its members.

One solution not considered for ensuring the Shia do not come to dominate the government is the "Lebanon model." As part of the National Pact of 1943, a system was created with confessional distribution of high-level government posts based on the 1936 Lebanese census.<sup>41</sup> In this unwritten agreement, the office of the Presidency would always go to a Maronite Christian,<sup>42</sup> the office of Prime Minister to a Sunni Muslim,<sup>43</sup> and the Speaker of the House of Deputies to a Shia Muslim.<sup>44</sup> While some experts, such as Brumberg, would allow for senior government posts to be set up along sectarian lines in the short term,<sup>45</sup> a Lebanon-style government in Iraq is not a viable long-term option.<sup>46</sup> While it may ensure all major interest groups in Iraq have representation, it would also reflect and exacerbate the particularism, making it much more difficult for the Iraqi government to eventually move away from sectarianism and more towards meritocracy. Finally, such a system would greatly increase the difficulty of viable secular parties ever developing as it did in Lebanon.<sup>47</sup>

Another unsound option is a return of the monarchy. Monarchy has a number of proponents because it would provide a national force to give legitimacy to the government as well as serving as a "guiding hand" as the country moves toward democracy, much as Spain's monarchy did during the country's political transition in the 1970s.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, it would allow Iraq to follow the precedents of Arab states such as Jordan, Bahrain and Qatar as their monarchs appear to be slowly "guiding" their people toward a more democratic system while maintaining stability. However, a monarchy might not be well received. After all, the original monarchy was installed by the British and consisted of the former rulers of the Hijaz (a region in present-day Saudi Arabia, making them outsiders to Iraq), though it appears the monarchy did gain some support during its few decades reign. Another complicating issue is that the monarchy was overthrown forty-five years ago—more than one generation back. Hence, there is little collective memory of the king. A monarch could inspire fears of a new dictator once again imposed by Western powers. According to an August 2003 Zogby International poll conducted in Iraq, while 60.7 percent of the population feel Saudi Arabia will help Iraq in the next five years,<sup>49</sup> only 17.4 percent want to copy their monarchical form of government.<sup>50</sup> Focus groups in June and July confirm this.<sup>51</sup> Thus, while the guiding hand of a monarch could be stabilizing, the difficulties of such a monarchy achieving legitimacy and true allegiance from the Iraqi people outweigh the benefits.

In sum, a parliamentary, moderate PR government within a federal system would likely provide the best guidelines for democracy in Iraq.

## The Role of Interest Groups

One of the most critical decisions is what role interest groups will play in a democratic Iraq where two issues particularly stand out. The first and most pressing is: what role should Islamic groups, namely Islamic clerics, be allowed to play in a democratic Iraq? The second: what role should sectarian groups, most notably the Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish parties, along with other minorities such as the Turkomen and Christians, play in the future political system?

### Is there a Role for Islam?

Islamists always have played a strong role in Iraqi politics. The question therefore becomes what role should they be allowed to play as a constitutional government is created. Should an Islamic democracy be set up or a solely secular government? Should clerics or Islamic political parties be allowed to hold office?

Islamic political thought is loosely divided into two groupings: radicals and moderates. Political scholar James Q. Wilson defines radical Muslims as those “who believe that there is one set of moral rules superior to all others, laid down by God and sometimes enforced by the fear of eternal punishment, [and] will understandably expect their nation to observe and impose these rules.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, religious values should be enforced in order to save all. But such a ruling comes at a price. There is little if any religious freedom, religious intolerance abounds, and most often, the authorities that enforce such standards are autocratic. Thus, there will be no democratic tendencies among radical Islamists in power. This is perhaps best-evidenced by the establishment of a theocratic, radical Islamist state in Iraq’s neighbor, Iran.<sup>54</sup>

In contrast, moderate Muslims have sought to mix Western and Islamic thinking to create Islamic democracies. Leading Islamist scholars believe there is a “natural affinity of Islam with science and reason,” which justifies the mixing of secular and Islamic traditions, and that “reason [w]as given by God to protect humankind from either excess or adulteration of religion.”<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, moderates are most often ignored by the media or jailed by governments who lump them into the same category as the radicals, and their small numbers and lack of recognition have left them with little influence.<sup>56</sup> We would argue that although the radical voices seem to have the upper hand at present (especially their widespread influence upon the media, and their terrorist actions against the US), the *silent majority* of Muslims, and particularly Iraqi Muslims, as earlier described, are much more likely aligned with moderate views.<sup>57</sup>

America can best serve the interests of Iraqis by ensuring that the transition government includes reform-minded moderates who understand the dangers of radicalism and seek to overcome the internal problems of the past in an effort to build a viable government. Following this line of reasoning, the defeat of Saddam and democratization of Iraq could provide the opening these Islamists have been looking for. Moderate influence has the potential for providing an alternative future for the Middle East, one much better suited to solving the difficult demographic and economic problems that have only grown worse in an era of authoritarian rule and growing radical discontent.<sup>58</sup>

### *Why Islam Cannot be Ignored*



One of the most intriguing and at first glance perplexing decisions regarding Iraqi democracy concerns the dichotomy between an “Islamic government” and a secular one. Typically, an Islamic government, especially in its more extreme forms, is based on the definitions by Mir Zohair Husain in which Sharia law “becomes civil law, as well as the principal means of social and political action.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, religion and politics would become inseparable.<sup>60</sup> Still, the Quran does not outline an actual form of government, but it spells out general guidelines for a government system. As Zakaria stated, “the truth is that little is to be gained by searching the Quran for clues to Islam’s true nature. The Quran is a vast book, filled with poetry and contradictions—much like the Bible and the Torah.”<sup>61</sup> Thus, there is no specific formula for an Islamic government.

Still, the Quran contains the concepts of *shura* (consultation), *ijma* (consensus), and *Maslah* (public interest).<sup>62</sup> Historically, a traditional Arab tribal leader was not given license to rule arbitrarily; he would customarily consult with the *majlis* (tribal council). In theory, this meant the ruler was held accountable by the tribal council, and in fact, selection of a new tribal leader was subject to this council’s approval. His position was not necessarily hereditary. This suggests that a democratic-like system of restraint was in place among the early Arab Bedouin tribesmen and was viewed as falling in line with Quranic precepts.<sup>63</sup> So even without a specific formula, the Quran backs, even suggests, a democratically organized method of governance.

Minus a small percentage of Christians, Iraq is essentially an Islamic country. As demonstrated in focus groups and innumerable Iraqi “man on the street” interviews, one of the most pressing fears is that Western values, as seen regarding promiscuity, rights of women, and the overall perceived degradation of moral values, will befall the Iraqi people.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, Iraqi citizens clamor for “Islamic values” in government;<sup>65</sup> and “Islamist movements constitute the most important, if not the sole, segment of opposition to existing regimes.”<sup>66</sup> It therefore appears Iraq is ripe for “Islamic democracy.”

However, this is not the case. We argue that a secular government will be essential for an Iraqi democratic regime to survive. The future Iraqi government must be secular because there is no consensus on just who the final arbiter would be on what is, or is not, Islamic.<sup>67</sup> The Shia-Sunni divide over what constitutes a legitimate Islamic philosophy of governance would likely prove insurmountable. Moreover, there are significant cleavages within each of the Islamic communities.<sup>68</sup> After all, there is no religious establishment with overwhelming legitimacy among Iraqis that can declare a correct interpretation in the same way the Supreme Leader can for Iran.<sup>69</sup> Take the Shia of Iraq, for example. Author Phoebe Marr estimates approximately one-third of Iraqi Shia, predominantly the poor and downtrodden, want an Islamic republic, while another third would like Islamic influence in society, but no actual Islamic government. Finally, the remainder probably wants a secular government. Certainly among those Shia who may be interested in Islamic government, there is considerable disagreement on who exactly would constitute the final authority on what is or is not Islamic, as the litany of competing Shia clerics within Iraq demonstrates.

Still, critical to this argument is the need for “bridges” between the moderate Islamists and secular democrats, according to Abdul Alkebsi. “You can’t have a democracy movement without

Islamists in the Arab world.”<sup>70</sup> Thus, the essentiality of a secular government in Iraq also requires Islamist support in order to achieve success.

## **Sunni, Kurdish and Christian Roles**

Sunni Arab and Kurdish Iraqis have an even greater incentive for supporting a secular government; for in an Islamic regime, sheer numbers would allow the Shia to rule over the Sunnis and Kurds. Thus, while there are Sunnis and Kurds who might favor an Islamic form of government, the reality is that these two communities must also push for a secular government in order to have any say in governance; this is even more so for the Christian communities in Iraq.<sup>71</sup>

As is often the case when faced with “Islamic” governance, women’s groups are also more likely to support secular government than non-secular government, recognizing that this is imperative if they hope to one day have equal rights and be allowed to compete on equal footing.<sup>72</sup>

Polling data supports this view. In the Zogby poll, 60.3 percent of Iraqis favored a government where everyone practices his/her own religion.<sup>73</sup> The NDI focus group points to “voices clearly raised against clerical control and domination of politics,” although most do agree that the views of religious thinkers and the values of Islam should be taken into account when building the government.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, a secular government is the only hope for a lasting democracy in Iraq.

If one allows Islamists in a secular government, one concern is guarding against religious extremists taking over the government and imposing their own version of governance on the population. The solution lies not only in the establishment of common values and norms, but also with the creation of political parties in sufficient but contained number so as to prevent any one faction from gaining too much power, and by the same token, avoid a coalition that becomes unwieldy and ungovernable. With multiple parties, many are given a voice, even the more extremist voices. However, no party has sufficient power to actually take over the government. A coalition must be built that will increase the likelihood of actually running the government—a move that would require power-sharing and compromise. Therefore, a carefully crafted parliamentary PR system would be most likely to yield these results. This would also allow moderate (even extremist) Islamists, including the clerics (assuming they can be elected) to enter the government without fear of a take-over by Islamist groups.

As a final, important consideration, where Islamists have been allowed a share of power, their popularity has usually suffered. Zakaria notes: “If countries do more to include the [Islamist radical or moderate] fundamentalists in the system, they will stop being seen as distant heroes and will be viewed instead as local politicians.”<sup>75</sup>

It is true that wherever Muslim fundamentalists have been involved in day-to-day politics—Bangladesh, Pakistan, Turkey, Iran—their luster has worn off. They routinely poll well below traditional political parties. People have realized that the streets still have to be cleaned, government finances have to be managed and education tended to. The mullahs can preach, but they cannot rule.<sup>76</sup>

In other words, the politics of inclusion is more likely to limit the Islamists’ power and influence upon the population than any effort to exclude them where they might otherwise be viewed as

“Robin Hoods.” This is particularly true for radical Islamists, the likes of which include Osama bin Laden.

The various ethnic groups will also need to be incorporated in the coming democratic government. One concern is the almost certainty that, for at least the next years, voting will probably be along sectarian lines, meaning Shia will inherently receive more votes. Certainly the “tyranny of the majority” could be a significant problem. Should Sunnis and Kurds feel oppressed by the Shia majority, they may opt out of an Iraqi democratic system, and many of the original fears of ethnic violence would be realized.<sup>77</sup> Rather, many of the prescriptions for incorporating Islamists into a democratic government will work just as well in ensuring the different ethnic groups each have a voice: federalism, a moderate amount of proportional representation, and a moderate number of political parties.

Nevertheless, more must be done to encourage secular parties to eventually form in Iraq. Polling data and focus groups demonstrate that many Iraqis have secular feelings when it pertains to government. Whether this translates into Iraqis actually willing to vote for secular parties rather than voting for their own ethnic or religious groups remains to be seen. However, the foundation exists for the eventual formation of secular parties. Critical to this will be building a civil society to include the guarantee of civil rights, for civil society allows groups to transcend ethnic boundaries, organize, raise funds, and eventually become viable political parties.

### **Defining Long-term Success**

Given the decades required to establish democracies in South Korea and Taiwan, cultures with few, if any, of the foundations of a liberal regime, expecting a stable democracy in Iraq in only a few years is completely foolhardy. The road to democracy will be rocky, and two steps forward will sometimes lead to one step back. Nevertheless, there are some items over the coming years which will indicate if Iraq is gradually proceeding along the right path.

The first criterion regards civil rights. President Bush defined these rights in Iraq during his 29 January 2002 State of the Union Address as, “the rule of law; limits on the power of the state; respect for women; private property; free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance.”<sup>78</sup> Of course, coupled with this is the creation of an independent judiciary, a process that is already underway in Iraq. For without these, federalism and parliamentary representation cannot withstand “the tyranny of the majority” nor the rule of the mob. The Iraqi government must respect human rights, and the Iraqi people should expect their rights to be protected. After thirty years of dictatorship, establishing these expectations will probably be as hard as guaranteeing them.

The second point is a business-friendly environment. Peter McPherson, serving as senior US advisor to Iraq’s Finance Ministry, demonstrates the challenges to this when he says, “this place was probably affected less by the forces of supply and demand than any place I have ever seen.”<sup>79</sup> According to Bremer, to establish a vibrant private sector will require “the wholesale reallocation of resources and people from state control to private enterprise, the promotion of foreign trade, and the mobilization of domestic and foreign capital.” He then continues on to

specific requirements such as a transparent commercial code, property rights, and a social safety net.<sup>80</sup>

The final measure involves the electoral system. This criterion goes beyond merely having free and fair elections the first time around. That first election in Iraq will very likely be free and fair given that it will almost certainly be conducted while still under occupation, and the whole process will be under the scrutiny of international observers and media. Real democracy will occur when the opposition party wins for the first time and a smooth transition of power takes place. While this will almost certainly be years (if not decades) away, it is the day we eagerly await in judging a newly democratic Iraq.

Iraq faces tremendous challenges to the process of democratization; Kolakowski cites four pitfalls as particularly appropriate potential traps for Iraq as it moves from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one. The first is the growth of “malignant nationalism.” He defines this as separate from patriotism, which is “the attachment to national cultural heritage and language, and the desire to make one’s nation better off and more civilized.” Nationalism is “malignant and hostile to civilizations when it asserts itself through belief in the natural superiority of one’s own tribe and the hatred of others.”<sup>81</sup> Certainly, a constant refrain as the war began was the fear of Iraq falling into civil war along sectarian lines as central authority collapsed. So far, this has not occurred, but that possibility remains.

A second pitfall is religious intolerance and theocratic aspirations.<sup>82</sup> The menace is evident in not only the followers of Shia cleric Moqtada Sadr and in the small groups of Wahhabis<sup>83</sup> in Iraq, but also in the polling data suggesting 33 percent of Iraqis would like an Islamic government.<sup>84</sup> Still, more recent polling data from Baghdad more specifically indicates about the same amount of interest (30 percent) in a more democratic-like shura system, or rule by councils of tribal and ethnic leaders.<sup>85</sup>

Another hazard is posed by the danger of terrorism and criminal violence.<sup>86</sup> Actions of *fedeyeen*<sup>87</sup> and religious terrorist organizations create significant obstacles to the democratic process. While one hopes more law and order develops now that Saddam has been captured and as more Iraqi police and security forces take to the streets, the near future remains uncertain. With porous borders and much motivation, terrorist groups made up of Islamist radicals are likely menace the population for years to come, albeit probably at much lower levels than currently seen.

Finally, there is a potential danger to democracy from “a mentality of endless expectations.”<sup>88</sup> We see this already in opinions of Iraqis that the US could immediately fix the power grid, establish law and order, and a myriad of other complaints if it really wanted to. There is an expectation of omnipotence about the US that has not and cannot be fulfilled. Additionally, Iraqis appear to expect that an economically stable and prosperous Iraq with an effective government can be set up overnight. The fear is that such expectations will breed greater resentment than currently seen. Besides, no newly democratic government can meet all Iraqi expectations, even with the best of intentions. Thus, Iraqi patience and a belief in their ability to impact their own futures are the best hope for ensuring a democratic system is established and endures.

## **Policy Recommendations for the United States**

In the short term, the United States must refute the accusation that it is only in Iraq to exploit Iraq's oil, while entrusting as well as overseeing the tasks regarding the IGC, the constitutional process, and the many challenges the whole international community should come together to face. One of the first, basic means of accomplishing these goals is continuing to improve the basic infrastructure of Iraq—electricity, water, roads, and so forth.<sup>89</sup> Certainly this is an uphill battle. Infrastructure has suffered decades of neglect exacerbated by sanctions, air strikes, the recent war and looting. The country also lacks sufficient spare parts to make systems even limp along. Regardless of the extreme difficulties, this must be a top US priority. Coupled with such effort must be a mechanism to cut through red tape, a slow bidding process, and the like in the near-term so parts can be requisitioned quickly. Delays for repairing the infrastructure due to looting, lack of spare parts and bureaucracy are unacceptable, and continue to lead Iraqis to assume that the US is indeed only in Iraq for its oil, rather than the well-being of its citizens.

Not only will infrastructure improvement give credibility to the US occupation forces' goal of improving the standard of living for Iraqis, but it also benefits the media campaign that must take place in the country for a future Iraqi government to achieve legitimacy. Getting the word out on why the IGC and CPA are doing what they are doing must be a part of a coordinated education campaign. Prior to a constitution being presented for their vote in March 2005, Iraqis must be clear on what democracy and civil rights are all about. They must also understand that all will not be perfect just because they have "democracy." Conflict, although hopefully in non-violent tones, will continue between groups; and while the economy will likely improve, the Iraqis will hardly find themselves at the standard of living of Singapore or the like anytime soon. Having "ground truth" on what to expect from their government may decrease the likelihood of excessive expectations breeding greater resentment.

In regards to what form the final democratic Iraq must take, it is certainly true that only Iraqis can decide their fate. However, the United States must, in the old terminology of arms control, "trust but verify." The IGC has already witnessed some attempts by individuals to gain greater power within the Council, perhaps enough power to eventually dominate the government even with poor legitimacy amongst Iraqis. The United States must recognize that the current situation is a "target rich environment" for those seeking to form their own authoritarian governments in Iraq, maybe with the cooperation of very different groups within and without the country. The US must be on the lookout, and willing to step in behind the scenes to ensure various interest groups do not pose such a threat, regardless of what domestic or international support said factions may have.

Finally, the United States must be careful not to simply oversee a free and fair Iraqi election, declare the state a stable and lasting democracy, and go home. As casualties continue to mount and US national elections approach, this will certainly be tempting; but doing so will only hurt the United States in the end. Even after the official "occupation" ends and US military forces are drawn down, liaison will have to continue between US and Iraqi police forces, between US and Iraqi military apparatus, and the same will most certainly hold true for political and financial organizations as well. The current State Department plan for the US Embassy in Iraq, with over 3000 diplomatic staff, the largest diplomatic staff in the world, is a strong beginning.<sup>90</sup> Not only

will this increase the likelihood of the Iraqi government remaining stable, but will ensure Iraq's neighbors that this large footprint is sufficient to prevent a re-embodied Iraq from threatening its neighbors. Furthermore, it will avoid the need for a lasting occupation force in the region.

If the United States gives up and goes home, the results would be nothing short of catastrophic. The Iraqis would likely descend into authoritarian government or civil war—or both, and the US would once again be seen as abandoning its friends when the going gets tough—a la Beirut and Mogadishu. Withdrawing could therefore deal a crippling blow to America's influence overseas. As William Kristol and Robert Kagan point out regarding President Bush's vision of a more democratic Middle East, "[it] will, in the coming months, either be launched successfully, or die in Iraq. Indeed, there is more at stake than even this vision of a better, safer Middle East. The future course of American foreign policy, American world leadership, and American security are at stake. Failure in Iraq would be a devastating blow to everything the United States hopes to accomplish, and must accomplish, in the decades ahead."<sup>91</sup>

### Notes

1. Anthony Zinni, quote from speech to Middle East Institute, Washington, DC, 10 October 2002.
2. Thomas O. Melia and Brian M. Katulis, *Iraqis Discuss Their Country's Future: Post-War Perspectives From the Iraqi Street* (Baghdad and Washington: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 28 July 2003,) 16. Online at <http://www.ndi.org/>.
3. Condoleezza Rice, "Transforming the Middle East," *Washington Post*, 7 August 2003, 21.
4. Amir Taheri, "The Iraq Effect," *New York Post*, 8 September 2003.
5. Fareed Zakaria, "What We Should Do Now," *Newsweek*, 1 September 2003.
6. Toby Dodge, "US Intervention and Possible Iraqi Futures," *Survival* 45 (Autumn 2003): 104.
7. Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: WW Norton & Co, 2003), 46.
8. Zakaria, *Illiberal Democracy*, 47.
9. Zakaria, *Illiberal Democracy*, 55.
10. Zakaria, *Illiberal Democracy*, 77.
11. The term "liberal autocracies" refers to Arab governments which temper authoritarianism with pluralism. "They are liberal in the sense that their leaders not only tolerate but promote a measure of political openness in civil society, in the press, and even in the electoral system of their country. ... But they are autocratic in that their rulers always retain the upper hand." Daniel Brumberg, Middle East Series Working Papers, "Liberalization Versus Democracy:

Understanding Arab Political Reform,” No. 37 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 2003), 3. Online at <http://www.ceip.org/files/Publications/wp37.asp?from=pubauthor>.

12. Fouad Ajami, “Beirut, Baghdad,” *Wall Street Journal*, 25 August 2003.

13. Quoted by Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Council Leaders Pressing for Power,” *Washington Post*, 1.

14. Iraqi Governing Council and Coalition Provisional Authority, *The November 15 Agreement: Timeline to a Sovereign, Democratic and Secure Iraq*. Online at <http://www.cpa-iraq.org/government/AgreementNov15.pdf>. Note that the 30 June 2004 projected handover date from the Coalition Provisional Authority to Iraqi authorities is current as of this writing, but remains subject to change.

15. Amin Saikal, “Democracy and Peace in Iran and Iraq,” *Democratization in the Middle East*, Amin Saikal and Albrecht Schnabel, eds. (New York: United Nations University Press, 2003), 167.

16. Saikal, 168.

17. Phillippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, “What Democracy Is...And Is Not,” *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 40.

18. Schmitter and Karl, 40.

19. Schmitter and Karl, 40.

20. Leszek Kolakowski, “Uncertainties of A Democratic Age,” *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 321.

21. Schmitter and Lynn, 51.

22 Alina Romanowski, goals spelled out during guest lecture at US Air Force Academy, 11 September 2003.

23. Melia and Katulis, 31.

24. Melia and Katulis, 31-33.

25. Interestingly, the IGC voted to expel al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya reporters from Iraq for allegedly inciting violence, thus going against this recommendation at the present time. See Richard Loyd Parry, “Iraqi Council Bans Al-Jazeera Reports,” *London Times*, 23 September 2003, 1.

26. David Brumberg, interview by authors, Carnegie Foundation, Washington, DC, 5 September 2003.

27. Melia and Katulis, 16.

28. About one-third of Iraqi's favor an Islamic-based government and another one-third prefer an actual Islamic government. However, support for a Saudi model was only 17.4% and support for an Iran model was a dismal 3.1%, meaning that the one-third support does not mean Iraqi's want to follow in Saudi or Iranian footsteps. Interestingly, support for the United States as a model was the largest at 23.3%, followed by "None" at 21.9%. See Zogby International Survey for American Enterprise Magazine, *Zogby International Survey of Iraq August 2003* (Iraq: Zogby International), 2.

29. Melia and Katulis, 15.

30. The TNA is scheduled to replace the Iraqi Governing Council and Coalition Provisional Authority on 30 June 2004. Incidentally, the Iraqi Interim Constitution spoke of in the press and signed on 9 March 2004, is only effective after 30 June and until the actual Constitution is ratified. The interim document was agreed upon by all 25 members of the IGC and is available online at <http://www.agonist.org/archives/014123.html>.

31. "Shia Pressure May Alter Iraq Plan," 27 November 2003. Online at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3242018.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3242018.stm).

32. L. Paul Bremer III, "Operation Iraqi Prosperity," *Wall Street Journal*, 20 June 2003.

33. See Adeed and Karen Dawisha, "How to Build a Democratic Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2003): 36-50.

34. Brumberg, interview.

35. Adeed and Karen Dawisha, 37-39.

36. Adeed and Karen Dawisha, 41-42.

37. Adeed and Karen Dawisha, 42.

38. Arend Lijphart, "Constitutional Choices for New Democracies," *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 155.

39. Michael J. Sadaro, *Comparative Politics: A Global Introduction* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001), 514.

40. Sadaro, 602.



41. Headquarters, Department of the Army, Area Handbook Series, *Lebanon: A Country Study* (United States: Library of Congress, 1989), 143.
42. *Lebanon*, 146.
43. *Lebanon*, 148.
44. *Lebanon*, 150.
45. Brumberg interview.
46. Judith Yaphe, interview by authors, Washington, DC, 5 September 2003, and Brumberg interview. Brumberg suggested senior government positions could be selected along sectarian lines (along the lines of a Lebanon model) but only for initial terms of limited-duration, but then must move toward a system of meritocracy. Yaphe emphatically argues against a “Lebanon” model.
47. Phebe Marr, Speech to Arab-US Policymaker’s Conference sponsored by the National Council on US-Arab Relations, Washington, DC, 8 September 2003 and Yaphe interview.
48. Adeed and Karen Dawisha, 42.
49. Zogby International, 5.
50. Zogby International, 2.
51. Melia and Katulis, 18.
52. Husain actually divides Islamists into three groups: *Revolutionary Islamists*—those typically labeled *fundamentalists* in the West, which include the likes of Osama bin Laden and others who favor “aggressive political action” against Middle Eastern regimes and Western intruders; *Traditional Islamists*—also often equated with fundamentalists (above), but who seek a less activist means of returning to Islamic traditions, though they are also anti-Western; and Moderate, reformist or *Modernist Islamists*—who interpret the teachings of Islam in a more progressive light and allow for modern interpretation, or *ijtihad*, as well as interaction with the West. See Mir Zohair Husain, *Global Islamic Politics* (New York: Addison Wesley, 2003), 63-130. For additional evidence of the Islamist split, see Emmanuel Sivan, “The Clash Within Islam,” *Survival* 45 (Spring 2003): 25-44.
53. James Q. Wilson, “The Reform Islam Needs,” *Front Page Magazine*, 29 October 2002.
54. Andrew Sullivan, “This is a Religious War,” *New York Times*, 7 October 2001, 6. Online at [www.nytimes.com/2001/10/07/magazine/07RELIGION.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/07/magazine/07RELIGION.html).
55. Roy R. Andersen, et al, *Politics and Change in the Middle East* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 161.

56. Support for this view can be found in “On the Struggle Against Corruption in the Arab Regimes,” MEMRI # 411, 14 August 2002. Online at <http://memri.org/>.
57. Masmoudi, President of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, Washington, DC, actually refers to them as the “silenced majority,” and says that “Liberal Islam represents the overwhelming majority within the Muslim world.” See Radwan Masmoudi, “The Silenced Majority,” *Journal of Democracy* 14 (April 2003). Online at [http://www.islam-democracy.org/art\\_jod\\_april-2003.asp](http://www.islam-democracy.org/art_jod_april-2003.asp).
58. Evidence of radical Islamist infiltration into Iraq spelled out by Bradley Graham, “General Cites Rising Peril of Terror in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, 22 August 2003, 1; and Audrey Hudson, “Foreign Militants Converging, Making Iraq Terror Battlefield,” *Washington Times*, 25 August 2003, 1.
59. Husain, 42.
60. The term *shura* (consultation) “often refers to a group, assembly, or council of knowledgeable and pious Muslims who are consulted by leaders.” See Husain, 376.
61. Zakaria, *Illiberal Democracy*, 123.
62. For further discussion of these principles in relation to democracy, see Dilip Hiro, *Holy Wars: The Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 45; See also Mehdi Noorbaksh, “The Middle East, Islam and the United States: The Special Case of Iran,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol II No 3, 86, for further discussion of these principles in relation to democracy.
63. Michael C. Hudson, *Arab Politics: the Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 90.
64. Melia and Katulis, 16 & 46.
65. Melia and Katulis, 46.
66. Graham E. Fuller, “Islamist Politics in Iraq After Saddam Hussein,” *Special Report # 108* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, August 2003), 2.
67. Brumberg interview.
68. Marr speech.
69. Zakaria, *Illiberal Democracy*, 124.
70. Abdul Alkebsi, a program officer at the National Endowment for Democracy, is quoted in Jane Lampman, “Easing into Islamic Democracy,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 May 2003. Online at [http://www.islam-democracy.org/art\\_csm\\_may-29-2003.asp](http://www.islam-democracy.org/art_csm_may-29-2003.asp).

71. Melia and Katulis 21.

72. This passage actually speaks to the likelihood of women's rights organizations (among others) to tacitly back autocracies given their lack of capability to organize against Islamist groups. See Brumberg, "Liberalization vs. Democracy," 9. However, focus groups also bear this out somewhat, noting Shia women were somewhat more likely not to support Islamists supporting religious men in running the affairs of a country. See Melia and Katulis, 24.

73. Zogby International, 3.

74. Melia and Katulis, 24.

75. Zakaria, *Illiberal Democracy*, 149.

76. Zakaria, *Illiberal Democracy*, 149.

77. Brumberg interview.

78. Quoted by Philip H. Gordon, "Bush's Middle East Vision," *Survival*, 45 (Spring 2003): 160.

79. Quoted by Scott Wilson, "Bremer Shifts Focus To New Iraqi Economy," *Washington Post*, 27 May 2003, 12.

80. L. Paul Bremer III, "Operation Iraqi Prosperity," *Wall Street Journal*, 20 June 2003.

81. Kolakowski, 322-3. Note, there are actually five pitfalls according to Kolakowski, however, as he is writing from an Eastern European perspective, the first relates to Sovietism, which is not relevant to this paper.

82. Kolakowski, 323.

83. Scott Peterson, "How Wahhabis Fan Iraq Insurgency," *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 September 2003, 1.

84. Zogby International, 3.

85. Interestingly, this Gallup poll indicates an even larger share, 40 percent, favor a parliamentary form of government, good news that supports our argument for secular democracy; and overall, 60 percent believe either a parliamentary or *shura* form of governance will emerge in Iraq. See Sabah al-Anbaki and Mark Memmott, "Poll: Baghdadis Favor Form of Democracy," *USA Today*, 26 September 2003, 5.

86. Kolakowski, 323.

87. The *fedeyeen*, a recently-organized group of Iraqi militants under the command of Saddam's son, Uday, were responsible for organizing local resistance to coalition forces, seeking deserters

from the regular Army, and other non-standard military roles. Made up of Saddam loyalists, these are believed to be the majority of those who continue to resist coalition force occupation and the ongoing reconstruction of Iraq.

88. Kolakowski, 323-4.

89. Nearly all those we interviewed as well as many scholarly sources have stressed the need for infrastructure restoration (especially water and electricity) as an overall, first, critical need. Without showing that the US can do this, the US would lose all credibility among the Iraqi populace. Fortunately, Bremer seems to recognize this and has focused CPA efforts in early months on restoring water and electricity, both of which are now available in quantities exceeding pre-war levels.

90. Robin Wright, "US Has Big Plans for Embassy in Iraq," *Washington Post*, 2 January 2004, 14. Of note, the US Embassy in Egypt has the largest total staff with 7000, but most of this staff is other than diplomatic.

91. William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Do What It Takes In Iraq," *Weekly Standard*, 1-8 September 2003.