

MERIA

THE FUTURE OF IRAQ: DEMOCRACY, CIVIL WAR, OR CHAOS?

*By Michael Rubin

Pessimism regarding Iraq's future is unwarranted. Iraq faces many challenges, but success is still within reach. After 35 years of dictatorship, Iraqis have embraced a political process emphasizing compromise and coalition. They have successfully held elections and drawn up a constitution. Political brinkmanship is not necessarily a precursor to civil war. That said, Iraqi democracy faces many challenges. First and foremost is the insurgency. Premature reconciliation and concessions offered in the face of violence, however, will backfire. Neighboring states also may undermine Iraq's security, necessitating a long-term U.S. military presence.

This article was originally written for a project and conference on "After the Iraq War: Strategic and Political Changes in Europe and the Middle East," co-sponsored by the GLORIA Center and The Military Centre for Strategic Studies (CeMiSS) of Italy.

More than eight million Iraqis braved bombs and bullets to vote on January 30, 2005, in Iraq's first free elections in a half-century. President George W. Bush praised the Iraqi people from the White House, declaring, "In great numbers, and under great risk, Iraqis have shown their commitment to democracy. By participating in free elections, the Iraqi people have firmly rejected the anti-democratic ideology of terrorists."¹ But in subsequent weeks, talks bogged down, first over the formation of the government and more recently over the constitution.

While internal tensions will not dissipate anytime soon, Iraqis have shown a resiliency which suggests that while the path to democracy might be arduous and marred by violence, that they are nevertheless dedicated to making the political process work. As

Iraqis move toward their constitutional referendum and national elections for a full-term government, the greatest threat they face will be from outside powers seeking to destabilize Iraq by proxy. The key for success will be to abide by, without exception, a timeline for specific political milestones. Washington and the United Nations should not bend to pressure, be it from factions within Iraq or from interests outside, to alter the agreed framework. Milestones matter.

IS IRAQ READY FOR DEMOCRACY?

U.S. officials and public commentators have consistently underestimated Iraqis. Two months before Iraqis went to the polls, Leslie H. Gelb, former president of the Council on Foreign Relations, and Peter Galbraith, a former American ambassador to Croatia and

a lobbyist for the Kurdistan Regional Government, penned a commentary in the *Los Angeles Times* entitled, "Why Jan. 30 Won't Work" in which they argued that Iraq was not ready for elections.² In his weblog, Juan Cole, the president-elect of the Middle East Studies Association, argued that "The 1997 elections in Iran," in which the Guardian Council disqualified 234 out of 238 candidates, "were much more democratic."³

Like Cole, his fellow bloggers, and commentators, many of the fiercest critics of Bush Administration policy have never visited Iraq. They treat Iraq as a template upon which to impose a political agenda often shaped more by partisan disdain for the Bush Administration policy rather than by the situation in Iraq. Rashid Khalidi, an Arab studies professor at Columbia University, for example, authored a critique of U.S. policy in Iraq relying upon secondary sources.⁴ Council on Foreign Relations scholar David Phillips pilloried the failure of the post-war reconstruction in *Losing Iraq*.⁵ In its review of his work, *The Wall Street Journal* revealed that Phillips did not visit Iraq in the course of his research, and lifted descriptions of Iraqi cities directly from secondary newspaper accounts.⁶ Others seek credibility by visiting Coalition forward operating bases or the high-security International Zone, but do not venture outside the security bubble to meet ordinary Iraqis.⁷

Despite the pessimism emanating from Washington and the academy, the January 2005 Iraqi election campaign demonstrated just how far Iraqis had come. Political advertisements on *ash-Sharqiya*, Iraq's most popular television channel, were slick and, but for language, would not be out of place in an American political campaign. Amid pictures of flags, ballots, and Iraqi children, Interim Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi

promised "a bright future and a strong and competent Iraq."

U.S. allies Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen hold presidential elections, but restrict opposition campaigns to the point where incumbency is guaranteed.⁸ In Iraq, Allawi found the benefits of incumbency limited. The U.S. military and private security contractors helped transport Allawi to campaign rallies across the country, and the interim prime minister used the bully pulpit of his office to grant interviews to al-Iraqiya television and the al-Arabiya satellite channel. But, he could impose no restrictions on his competitors, many of whom adopted a grassroots campaign. Shi'a politicians broadcast their messages by radio so as to reach ordinary Iraqis who had no generators with which to run television during the frequent power outages, but could operate radios by battery.

In Sadr City, mosques run by firebrand cleric Muqtada al-Sadr urged their flocks to embrace the ballot. Many Shi'a politicians adopted a grassroots campaign. On January 9, 2005, tribal shaykhs from the outskirts of Najaf hosted a rally in the town of Mushkhab. Among those attending was Abd al-Karim Muhammadawi, known as the "Robin Hood of the Marshes" for his resistance against Saddam's army prior to the American occupation. Former Governing Council members Ahmad Barak and Ahmad Chalabi drove down from Baghdad for the event. On the streets of Baghdad, campaign posters jockeyed for wall space. Significantly, though, rival parties did not obstruct or deface their opponents' posters. Iraqis embraced political pluralism.

Because *The New York Times* forbids its reporters to travel outside daylight hours⁹ and other journalists rely on stringers,¹⁰ and the U.S. embassy's security officers restrict the

ability of diplomats to exit the heavily-fortified security zone,¹¹ much of the campaign occurred outside the notice of the Western audience.

AN ELECTORAL MILESTONE

Many commentators were therefore surprised by the high turn-out in the January 30, 2005 elections. The polls marked a watershed in Middle Eastern politics for two reasons:

First, they marked the first time in Iraq's history that that country's Shi'a community achieved a political voice proportional to their majority status. For more than eighty years, successive Iraqi governments had worked to marginalize and disenfranchise the Shi'a. The rise of the community to real political power after more than eight decades of systematic oppression is no less momentous than the 1994 victory of Nelson Mandela in South Africa's first multiracial presidential elections.

Second, and just as important, no party won a strong, working majority. The United Iraqi Alliance won a bare majority with 140 seats in the 275-member National Assembly; the Kurdish Alliance took 75 seats; and Allawi's Iraqi List won 40. Nine small parties divided the remaining 20 seats.¹² Iraqi political powerbrokers had to administer by coalition. While a king or strong president rules every other Arab country, no single ruler or party can dictate in Iraq. Parliamentarians have been forced to negotiate and compromise rather than impose. Corruption and abuse of power may

remain rife, but power-sharing created checks and balances. Within the administration, ministers, deputy ministers, and directors-general might all derive from different parties or factions. Their mutual distrust has obstructed ministerial power and created mechanisms for various constituencies to voice dissent to power. The central government in Baghdad may not be as efficient, but it is more democratic than the one-party regions of Iraqi Kurdistan which are ruled from Erbil and Sulaymaniyah.

After several weeks of negotiations, Ibrahim Jaafari, leader of the Da'wa party, emerged as the United Iraqi Alliance's nominee for prime minister. The slate's caucus was an indication of a growing acceptance of democratic norms. Within the slate, four candidates put forward their names. While many United Iraqi Alliance members expressed reservations about Jaafari and his pro-Islamic law positions, he outlasted his three competitors to emerge as the nominee.

True to Iraq's new political realities, other parties and interests issued demands in return for political support. The Kurdish Alliance, for example, insisted that their support for Jaafari would be contingent upon his support for federalism. Engaging in political brinkmanship, they threatened to cobble together an opposition slate to the United Iraqi Alliance with minority parties and defectors from the United Iraqi Alliance itself unless Jaafari acceded to their demands. Trading of support for different issues is likewise a backbone of politics. It implies a

leader's accountability to interests other than his own.

Whereas Iraqi politicians once served only to rubberstamp their leader's decisions, a decade of opposition conferences and the 15-month American interregnum encouraged political tolerance. After sunset, in Baghdad and across governorate capitals and rural tribal *diwans*, generators hum and reception rooms are abuzz with local notables. In back rooms, politicians from across Iraq make deals and exchange gossip. In the run-up to the August 15 constitutional deadline--and the August 22 extension--they debated whether religious or civil courts should judge family law, the division of national wealth under federalism, and political restrictions upon members of the Ba'th party.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL MILESTONE

The Iraqi National Assembly greeted with applause the August 22, 2005 announcement by its speaker Hachim al-Hasani that the constitutional commission had submitted a draft constitution. While the National Assembly agreed to discuss the draft and possibly offer amendments, the successful submission of a constitution undercut outside pundits who argued that the Iraqis should delay the constitutional process.¹³ The hurdles overcome by Iraqi politicians were significant. Debates over federalism and the role of Islam in the constitution polarized Iraq. While militiamen loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr attacked University of Basra students for socializing at a mixed-sex picnic,¹⁴ students flirt and socialize in the University of Salahuddin cafeteria in Erbil. Likewise, while vigilantes have firebombed liquor stores in Basra and Salam Maliki, the minister of transportation, has forbidden liquor sales at the once-popular Baghdad International Airport duty-free shop,¹⁵

middle-class families in the Mansour district of Baghdad and academics and professionals in Sulaymaniyah gather in clubs and enjoy whisky, beer, and the local ouzo-like *arak*.

Iraqis compromised on questions of the exclusivity of Islam as a source of legislation. While many Islamists argued that Islam should be considered "the source" of legislation rather than the less exclusive "a source," Islamists and liberal compromised upon a non-exclusive treatment of Islam "as a main source." While this is ideal to no group within the Iraqi political and religious spectrum, such is the nature of compromise. Similar compromises may allow Iraqis to opt to adjudicate matters of family law in civil rather than religious courts. Many women's groups fear the latter because of the inherent inequality of women in matters of divorce and inheritance under prevalent interpretations of Islamic law.¹⁶

Disagreements over federalism have become a more serious stumbling block across Iraq. But Kurdish political organization--and the morality of their cause--will undercut any attempts to roll back *de facto* federalism. Federalism is not a new concept for Iraq. Prior to the Ottoman Empire's defeat in World War I, what became Iraq was three separate Ottoman provinces: Basra in the south, Baghdad in the center, and Mosul in the north. Even after the 1921 establishment of monarchy, the final shape of Iraq remained in dispute as the nascent Turkish Republic laid claim to Mosul. The 1920 Treaty of Sevres promised Kurds an independent state, but the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne rescinded this commitment three years later. In 1925, a League of Nations commission arrived to adjudicate the dispute; they found in favor of Iraq, awarding the predominantly Kurdish province to the new government in Baghdad, on condition that,

"Regard must be paid to the desires expressed by the Kurds that officials of Kurdish race should be appointed for the administration of their country, the dispensation of justice, and teaching in the schools, and that Kurdish should be the official language of all these services."¹⁷ Such conditions were never fulfilled.

Successive governments in Baghdad failed to implement autonomy. While there were sporadic outbreaks of ethnic violence, throughout Iraqi history, a full-scale Kurdish revolt erupted in 1961. Years of low-intensity guerilla warfare led to a March 11, 1970 autonomy accord between the Iraqi government and its Kurdish opposition, but Baghdad never fully implemented the agreement. Disputes over the extent of Kurdistan (namely whether Kirkuk should be included) and Saddam's own effort to undermine the accords as the Ba'th party consolidated control, caused the collapse of Arab-Kurdish federalism and the resumption of low-intensity civil war. Nevertheless, the willingness of the Iraqi government to embrace federalism has had lasting impact in Iraq's collective memory.

Iraqi Kurdish history subsequent to the collapse of the autonomy accords is well known. During the late 1980s, Kurdish-populated northern Iraq was the scene of near total destruction, the Iraqi government having devastated more than 4,000 of the 4,655 Kurdish villages.¹⁸

Following Saddam's 1991 defeat in Operation Desert Storm and President George H.W. Bush's February 15, 1991 call that "The

Iraqi military and the Iraqi people [should] take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein the dictator to step aside,"¹⁹ the Kurds and Shi'a rose up against Saddam's authoritarian rule. Within a matter of days, the central government lost control of 14 out of Iraq's 18 governorates. But the Iraqi government fought back, and neither the United States nor other outside powers intervened. The Iraqi government used helicopter gun ships and armor to suppress the revolt. As more than a million Kurdish refugees streamed toward the Turkish border, President Turgat Özal of Turkey, urged the creation of a "safe haven" in northern Iraq. While the safe haven was initially quite small--only 36 square miles centered on the northern Iraqi town of Zakho--it soon expanded to incorporate Dahuk and encompassed 3,600 square miles. When, in October 1991, Saddam Hussein withdrew his government's administration from Iraqi Kurdistan in an attempt to blockade and starve the restive Kurds into submission, the area of *de facto* Kurdish control grew to almost 15,500 square miles.

The Kurds scrambled to create a political authority. They did so largely by democratic means, despite interludes of factional and tribal squabbles. Following elections in May 1992, the region's major political parties formed the Kurdistan Regional Government. Split by civil war in 1996--and still not integrated despite the symbolic unification of a powerless parliament in June 2005--the region has been effectively independent of Baghdad's control for almost 15 years. Iraqi

Kurdistan has its own ministries, budget, taxes, and army. It functions primarily in Kurdish; college age students in Sulaymaniyah and, increasingly in Erbil, can no longer speak Arabic. The region flies its own flag, runs its own television stations, and conducts its own foreign policy. While some Sunni politicians may oppose Kurdish federalism,²⁰ any debate is undercut by the reality on the ground. The central government has little sway in Iraqi Kurdistan, and little ability to impose its will through force, all the more so because the Shi'a also favor federalism in southern Iraq.²¹

While federalism may be a *fait accompli* in Iraq despite the threats of some Arab nationalist and Islamist interests,²² it is not without its dangers. Regional political leaders may be tempted to cheat in the sharing of resources. As occurred under Saddam Hussein's government, corrupt officials may siphon off oil to sell separately. The sharing of water may be more complicated than allocation of oil proceeds. Should the Kurdistan Regional Government fail to release water from the Dokan and Darbandikan dams, crops in the Iraqi Arab heartland could wither; the newly-restored southern marshes could again evaporate. In Iraqi Kurdistan, the failure of the Kurdistan Democratic Party to share revenue from the lucrative Ibrahim Khalil customs post sparked the outbreak of the three-year Kurdish civil war. Nevertheless, careful auditing can alleviate the danger until trust can build.

DOES U.S. STRATEGY UNDERCUT SECURITY?

While Iraqis have made significant political and economic progress, the security situation in central Iraq remains poor. As the insurgent violence has spiked, senior military

officials and diplomats have urged Iraqis to embrace and engage former Ba'thists and Arab Sunni rejectionists. If the Sunnis can be brought into the fold, the conventional wisdom goes, peace and reconciliation will prevail.

Evidence does not support such an assertion. Many of the insurgents are rejectionists with no desire to be a part of a new political process. They have neither voiced a political vision nor contributed to the well-being or safety of ordinary Iraqis. Their chief victims are not U.S. soldiers, but rather other Iraqis. A case in point was the August 19, 2005 murder of three Sunni Arab election workers in Mosul who were kidnapped as they put up election posters.²³

While terrorists alone bare responsibility for their actions, flawed U.S. policy has undermined stability and undercut Iraqi attempts to rectify security. Many Iraqi politicians, be they Arab Shi'a, Arab Sunni, or Kurdish, correlate the upsurge in insurgent attacks to the April 2004 decision by Coalition Provisional Authority administrator L. Paul Bremer to reverse de-Ba'thification. In effect, Bremer traded the good will of Iraq's 14 million Shi'a and six million Kurds for the sake of perhaps 40,000 Ba'thists. Since the transfer of sovereignty, diplomatic pressure upon Iraqis to reintegrate former Ba'thists has become even greater. One senior embassy official confided in an April 2005 e-mail that re-integration of former Ba'thists had become a mantra among U.S. diplomats.

The American strategy has backfired for several reasons: First, by trumpeting a Sunni strategy, the Coalition Provisional Authority deepened sectarianism and furthered the false perception that de-Ba'thification targeted large numbers of individual Sunnis on the basis of their religious beliefs rather than because of their past complicity in terror as

government and party officials. Many Ba'thists were Shiites and Kurds; many Sunni Arabs also ended up in Saddam's mass graves.

Second, the reconciliation policy has enabled Ba'thists to infiltrate into sensitive positions where they can work to undermine security.²⁴ No place has this occurred as starkly as in Mosul. Shortly after the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, the 101st Airborne took charge of Mosul and its environs. The division's commander, General David Petraeus, pursued a policy of reconciliation with both Ba'thists and Islamists. "The coalition must reconcile with a number of the thousands of former Ba'th officials...giving them a direct stake in the success of the new Iraq," he argued.²⁵ But his strategy failed. He appointed Colonel Ya'rob, the supervisor of checkpoints in the Nineweh governorate under the previous regime, to head the police guarding the Mosul governor's office. On July 14, 2004, assassins--likely with the benefit of inside information regarding schedules and movements--ambushed the governor's car. A more extreme example involved the appointment of another former Ba'thist, General Muhammad Kha'iri Barhawi to be Mosul's police chief. Barhawi kept a low-profile but used the space created by Petraeus and his successors to organize insurgent cells and lead a November 2004 uprising which briefly handed Iraq's second largest city over to insurgents.²⁶ Many Iraqi Shi'a remain upset that the U.S. officials appointed Major-General Muhammad Abdullah al-Shahwani, a

former Ba'thist, to lead the interim Iraqi intelligence service. Shahwani has employed proportionately fewer Shi'a in the new Iraq's intelligence service than during the time of Saddam Hussein.

Third, insurgents interpret premature reconciliation as rewarding violence. On March 31, 2004, following the murder and mutilation of four American security contractors in Fallujah, Bush declared, "America will never be intimidated by thugs and assassins."²⁷ After a month-long siege, though, the U.S. officials struck a deal with the insurgents whereby U.S. officials empowered the insurgents to form a Fallujah Brigade. Not only did the decision fail to co-opt insurgents, but it also allowed them safe-haven. Car bombing increased 600 percent in the following month. The insurgents absorbed the message that they could win through violence what they could not through the political process. The insurgency quickly spread to cities like Samarra and Mosul. Diplomatic pressure throughout April 2005 to increase Sunni representation on the Constitutional Drafting Committee resulted in an additional 15 Sunni members, but rather than placate the community, it only increased its demands. Violence, now perceived as the way to win concessions, increased.

The U.S. embassy nevertheless repeated its mistake in June 2005, when word leaked that both U.S. diplomats and military officials had approached Iraqi insurgents in order to encourage them to renounce violence and join the political process.²⁸ A National Security Council senior director rationalized

the approach by differentiating between talking to and negotiating with insurgents. The Arab world drew no such distinction. A June 28, 2005 *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* cartoon depicted Uncle Sam, surrounded by barbed wire, with an insurgent leader blocking the only path to escape. The perception was one of weakness, not magnanimity. Violence again spiked.

If the West wants Iraq to continue on the path to stability, security, and democracy, they should listen to the Iraqis. U.S. officials should not interfere with Iraqi politicians who aim for sweeping de-Ba'thification. Iraqis understand the nuances of their history, security, and politics better than any diplomat serving a six-month tour, or serviceman without personal connection to their country.

Several Iraqi politicians have suggested that they may consider a policy under which former party members might still work in government, but be prohibited from assuming any position of command authority; i.e., colonel or above in the Iraqi military, or director-general or above in civil service. American diplomats and intelligence officers may not want to see their contacts lose their jobs or suffer demotion, but such may be the price not only of security, but also of sovereignty and democracy. Reversing the insurgency--and enabling Iraq's fragile democracy to take root--will require listening to Iraqis. While the Multinational Forces, the European Union, and the Jordanian government may run training programs for the Iraqi recruits, Iraqi officials--not foreigners--should decide who should take part. Iraqis are capable of building a better life, should they not be hampered by American naïveté, however well-meaning it may be.

THE THREAT FROM OUTSIDE POWERS

The positive evolution of Iraqi politics and economy may not be enough to ensure Iraq's security. Iraq's military is too weak to defend itself against threats from its neighbors, and it retains poor control over its borders. The intentions of countries like Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Syria remain far from uncertain. The Turkish military is increasingly agitated about the presence of Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) terrorists in Iraqi Kurdistan²⁹ and Iraqi Kurdish intentions toward the disputed city of Kirkuk. While all of Iraq's neighbors wanted the United States to succeed militarily in Iraq, none want liberated Iraq to be successful or democratic. The Turkish government fears any precedent which benefits Iraqi Kurds. The Iranian leadership suspects any independent Shi'a voice it cannot control. Iraq's other neighbors fear the empowerment of a Shi'a majority.³⁰ Furthermore, a stable Iraq is in the interest of neither Saudi Arabia nor Iran, neither of whom can afford to lose the supplemental oil production they undertook following the 1990 United Nation's sanctioning of Iraq.

As a result, with the possible exception of Kuwait, Iraq's neighbors have sought to undermine the country's stability. For instance, the Turkish government has bankrolled the Iraqi Turkmen Front. Before the war, the Iraqi Turkmen Front consistently took a rejectionist position. It demanded inclusion in the Iraqi opposition leadership, but refused to recognize the legitimacy of any other group. While the Iraqi Turkmen Front claims to represent Iraq's nearly two million ethnic Turkmen, only a small number of Turkmen give the party their allegiance. When the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan subsidized the distribution of Kurdish flags to mixed

communities south of Kirkuk, most Turkmen responded by raising Shi'a banners rather than the Turkmen Front's white crescent on pale blue flag. As Kurds, long displaced from Kirkuk migrated back to the city, the Turkish military, egged on by the Iraqi Turkmen Front, threatened violence. Many Kurds point to the July 2003 infiltration of a Turkish Special Forces team, allegedly on a mission to assassinate Kurdish politicians in Kirkuk, as a sign of malicious Turkish intentions. Likewise, many Iraqis interpreted the Turkish Foreign Ministry's decision to approach directly the 101st Airborne with a request to construct a second border crossing as a deliberate attempt to bypass the Iraqi interior and foreign ministries.

Continuing suspicion and disunity between the Kurdistan Democratic Party and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, meanwhile, provides an opening for neighboring powers to fight by proxy, much as they did during the 1994-1997 Kurdish civil war. With so many militias now operating throughout the whole of Iraq, the country may be even more susceptible to the ill-will of outside powers.

Both the Iranian and Syrian governments have facilitated infiltration of men and materiel to aid the insurgency. The Iranian security apparatus challenged the United States almost immediately in Iraq. As Coalition forces advanced on Najaf in March 2003, Badr Corps units poured into northern Iraq from Iran, provoking a strong warning to Tehran by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.³¹ Well-connected Iranian journalist Ali Reza Nurizadeh reported elite

Iranian Revolutionary Guards "brought in radio transmission equipment, posters, pamphlets printed in (the Iranian holy city of) Qom, and huge amounts of money, some of which was used to buy weapons for the Badr Corps."³²

While the Iranian government often seeks plausible deniability by acting through proxy, Tehran has made no secret of its intentions in Iraq. Iran's charge d'affaires in Baghdad, Hassan Kazemi Qomi, was not actually a diplomat but rather a member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, whose job has been to export jihad; Qomi previously served as a liaison to Hizballah.³³ Meanwhile, Italian intelligence reports show that many members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard moved into southern Iraq in early 2004 to organize and train firebrand cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's militia.³⁴

By January 2004, the Badr Corps, trained and financed by Iran's Revolutionary Guards, had painted murals commemorating Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution, and displayed a banner declaring, "No to America, no to Israel, no to occupation." The Iranian government has not limited its support to a single faction or party. Rather, Tehran's strategy appears to be to support both the radicals seeking immediate confrontation with the U.S. occupation and Islamist political parties like the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and Ibrahim Jaafari's Da'wa Party. During the February 2005 United Iraqi Alliance negotiations to nominate a prime minister, the

Iranian government exposed its strategy when it ordered SCIRI's Adel Mehdi to step aside so that Jaafari could win, thereby implicating both SCIRI and Da'wa as Iranian clients. The August 2, 2005 abduction and murder of independent journalist Steven Vincent highlighted the growing problem of Shi'a militias and death squads in southern Iraq.

While the Iranian government may wish to subvert Iraq's democracy to prevent a free Shi'a state from undercutting Iran's social and religious foundations, the Syrian government has sought to undercut Iraqi security in order to amplify its own political importance and bog down American forces which it feels might otherwise threaten the Syrian regime. After months of internal U.S. debate about the degree of Syrian complicity in the insurgency, General Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said, "We know for a fact that a lot of them [foreign fighters] find their way into Iraq through Syria for sure."³⁵

As the elected, Shi'a majority government assumes power, the political conflict between Baghdad and Amman will likely grow. Iraqi antipathy toward Jordan is already high, because of a widespread belief that the Jordanian government colluded with Saddam Hussein's regime in order to receive discounted oil. Clumsy Jordanian interference in Iraqi politics also backfired. King Abdullah II has spun his theories at the White House, letting his personal animus to Ahmad Chalabi color Jordanian policy toward Iraq. The King's attempts to subsidize Arab nationalist politicians led Iraq's interim governing council to revoke the license of Jordan's Arab Bank to operate in Iraq. In December 2004, he raised hackles in Iraq when he spoke of the danger of a "Shi'a crescent," and, in a Spring 2005 *Middle East Quarterly* interview, he again spoke out

against the de-Ba'athification which so many Iraqis demand. Jordan may be a key U.S. ally, but Amman has its own regional interests which do not necessarily correlate with the interests of either Washington or Baghdad. If Iraq is to succeed, American policymakers should compartmentalize their diplomacy, and give greater weight to Iraqi input rather than that of Iraq's neighbors. To do otherwise would both create a perpetually weak Iraq and encourage external interference in the country.

With the exception of Turkey, none of Iraq's neighbors are democratic. Strength matters in the Middle East. Autocrats prey on weak neighbors. If Iraq is to succeed, it must be allowed to develop an independent policy that, at times, may put it at odds with its neighbors. This requires strength. While the newly-trained Iraqi security forces can increasingly patrol the streets of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul, U.S. forces remain in the country, albeit in the background. A long-term U.S. military commitment, albeit one that is non-intrusive to most Iraqis, will enable Iraq the space to develop its own identity and better immunize Iraqi society from the interference of its neighbors. For a continued U.S. presence to be palatable to Iraqis, U.S. officials should formalize a Status of Forces Agreement governing the presence of foreign troops. Many Iraqis would be amenable to such a presence. In contrast, calls for a commitment to withdraw completely from Iraq undercut stability and security on one hand by encouraging insurgents that they can outlast the United States in Iraq, and also by reinforcing the Iraqi psychosis of abandonment that has remained ever since President George H.W. Bush's decision not to support the 1991 Iraqi uprising which he helped spark.

CONCLUSION

The future of Iraq is anything but bleak. Newspapers carry headlines of devastating suicide bombings. But as tragic as these events are, Iraq has demonstrated a great deal of stability. Concerted efforts to launch popular rebellions have fallen flat. The insurgents still must enforce discipline through intimidation rather than win converts through ideology. While Iraq's road to democracy is anything but assured, Iraqis from a wide range of backgrounds appear determined not to revert back to dictatorship. The fracturing of Saddam Hussein's security system may have made returning to dictatorship impossible. Many Iraqi political leaders recognize the futility of civil war to impose one ethnic or sectarian group's will upon other Iraqi regions, especially since Kurds and Shi'a both increasingly favor regional federalism and many Arab Sunnis, even if they say they oppose the idea, nevertheless endorse its principles when they insist they do not want Kurds or Shi'a to govern their daily lives.

Iraq has come far in the two and a half years since the fall of Saddam Hussein. There has been considerable political progress in Iraq, evident not only in the electoral and constitutional milestones, but also in the Iraqi willingness to compromise and complain. The political process may not be efficient, but most democracies are not. Rhetoric may be shrill. The politics of brinkmanship often invites such positions. Brinkmanship in and of itself is not a threat to Iraq's stability, so long as Iraqis political factions ultimately

respect the primacy of the rule of law. For Iraqi political factions--especially the predominantly Sunni Arab parties which may feel themselves the losers in the new Iraq--to uphold the rule of law, it is essential that U.S. policymakers do not pressure Iraqis to compromise or reach consensus. In politics and democracy, some factions win, others lose. So long as each has a chance to reverse their political fortunes through the ballot box, there should be no need to threaten, let alone resort to violence. By responding to threats and seeking to impose a political solution to Iraq's insurgency, U.S. policymakers encourage violence, enable factions to augment their demands, and generally undercut Iraq's political development.

Democracy need not be forever a foreign concept in the Arab (and Kurdish) world. Culturally, Arabs are as capable of democracy as were Germans, Japanese, and Koreans. If Bush holds true to democracy as a goal in Iraq, though, his administration should accept that Iraqis may pursue some policies which contradict the desires of the U.S. foreign policy elite. Washington should not seek to impose re-Ba'athification or interfere in internal Iraqi purges of insurgents and their sympathizers. The complaints of outside parties like King Abdullah II are irrelevant; he is not Iraqi. Defeating the insurgency can be tough; it may require a decade. But if U.S. policymakers listen to the Iraqis, the future can be bright.

*Michael Rubin, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, is editor of the *Middle East Quarterly*.

NOTES

¹ "President Congratulates Iraqis on Election," January 30, 2005. www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050130-2.html

² Leslie Gelb and Peter Galbraith, "Why January 30 Won't Work," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 2004.

³ Juan Cole "Informed Comment" weblog, www.juancole.com/2005_01_01_juancole_archive.html.

⁴ See Michael Rubin, "Academic Standards, RIP," *Frontpage Magazine*, June 14, 2005 www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/Printable.asp?ID-18419 (Review of Rashid Khalidi's *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).

⁵ David Phillips, *Losing Iraq* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2005).

⁶ Robert Pollock, "The Armchair Analyst," *Wall Street Journal*, May 10, 2005.

⁷ See, for example, Jessica Mathews, "Iraqis Can do More," *The Washington Post*, September 29, 2003; and Jessica Mathews, "Match Iraq Policy to Reality," *The Washington Post*, September 23, 2004, both of which were based on a Defense Department-sponsored trip subject to Defense Department security regulations.

⁸ See, for example, Neila Charchour Hachicha, "Tunisia's Election was Undemocratic at All Levels," *The Middle East Quarterly* (Summer 2005). www.meforum.org/article/732.

⁹ Comments by a Baghdad-based *New York Times* correspondent in an interview with an Iraqi political figure. Baghdad, January 8, 2005.

¹⁰ Christine Chinlund, "Dateline: Baghdad," *The Boston Globe*, June 21, 2004.

¹¹ Michael Rubin, "Less is More in Iraq," *The Washington Post*, August 9, 2005. www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/08/AR2005080801147.html.

¹² Paul Delgrado, "Shi'a Alliance Declared Winner of Iraq Election," *The Times*, February 17, 2005.

¹³ See, for example, Marina S. Ottaway, "Iraq Calls for Unhurried Negotiations," *Financial Times*, July 20, 2005.

¹⁴ Anthony Shadid, "Picnic is no Party in the New Basra," *The Washington Post*, March 29, 2005.

¹⁵ Ellen Knickmeyer and Omar Fekeiki, "Alcohol Banner in Baghdad Airport," *The Washington Post*, July 30, 2005.

¹⁶ See for example, the website of the multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian Women's Alliance for a Democratic Iraq, www.wafdi.org

¹⁷ League of Nations, *Report submitted to the Council by the Commission instituted by the*

Council Resolution of September 30th, 1924. Document C.400, M.147, vii (Geneva, 1925), as cited in David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), pp. 145-46.

¹⁸ "Interview with Nasreen Mustafa Sideek, Kurdistan Regional Government Minister of Reconstruction and Development," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No. 7 (July 2001). www.meib.org/articles/0107_iri.html.

¹⁹ "Excerpts from Two Statements by Bush on Iraq's Proposal for Ending Conflict," *The New York Times*, February 16, 1991.

²⁰ "Iraq Delays Vote on Draft Constitution," CNN.com, August 22, 2005.

²¹ Bartle Breese Bull, "Islam, Federalism, and Oil," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 17, 2005.

²² Dan Murphy and Jill Carroll, "Why Iraq's Sunnis fear Constitution," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 24, 2005.

²³ Dexter Filkins, "3 Sunni Election Workers Seized and Killed in Mosul," *The New York Times*, August 20, 2005.

²⁴ Hannah Allam, "Saddam's Baath Party is Back in Business," Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service, September 7, 2004.

²⁵ David Petraeus, "Lessons of the Iraq War and Its Aftermath" (Summary of Remarks),

Policywatch #855, April 9, 2004. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1733.

²⁶ Richard Opiel and James Glanz, "More Iraqi Army Dead Found in Mosul," *The New York Times*, November 23, 2004.

²⁷ "Remarks by the President at National Republican Congressional Committee Dinner," Office of the Press Secretary, April 1, 2004. www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/04/20040401-7.html

²⁸ "Many Say only Political Solution Possible in Iraq," *Detroit Free Press*, June 13, 2005.

²⁹ "Ankara 'directionless' as US row over PKK deepens," *Turkish Daily News*, August 24, 2005.

³⁰ See, for example, King Abdullah II, "Iraq is the Battleground: The West against Iran," *Middle East Quarterly* (Spring 2005). www.meforum.org/article/688.

³¹ "Rumsfeld tells Syria and Iran to stay out of Iraq war," Agence France Presse, March 28, 2003.

³² *Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat*, April 25, 2003.

³³ *Al-Hayat*, April 6, 2004.

³⁴ Candito Mimmo, "La Repubblica Islamica Muove le Sue Pedine Tentando di non Scoprirsi con Washington I Lunghi fili dei burattinai di Teheran Un Confine Senza Controlli e un Inviato Speciale di Khamenei," *La Stampa*, April 8, 2004.

³⁵ Robert Burns, "Marines said to have Tightened Iraqi Border with Syria, but Taken More Casualties," Associated Press, April 16, 2004.