What is the Future of Democracy in Iraq?

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Dynamics of Recent Events in the Arab World: Framing the Arab and U.S. Responses
National Council on US Arab Relations
October 27, 2011
The US invasion and occupation of Iraq: the impact on democratization
How did US occupation affect Iraq’s democracy?

- Looting US allowed in April 2003 destroyed all Iraqi ministries except oil and defense.
- US dissolved Iraq’s conscript army (385,000 men) and national police in May 2003 and applied a “de-Ba’thification” policy.
- CPA’s elimination of agricultural subsidies (Aug. 2003) made Iraqi farmers’ goods less competitive with those from Iran and Syria.
A new phase in building democracy: electoral politics after 2005
Is Islam incompatible with democracy?

- Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has played a positive role in building democracy in Iraq – illustrating that Islam is not incompatible with democracy
- Ayatollah al-Sistani has condemned sectarian violence and encouraged national reconciliation
- He helped organize United Iraqi Alliance in 2004 in anticipation of first parliamentary elections (12/2005)
- He has issued religious decrees informing Shiite women that they must vote in elections
- al-Sistani has fought to limit the power of sectarian forces, especially Shiite militias
The elections of 2005

- Elections were held in Jan. 2005 for a Transitional National Assembly and full elections in Dec. 2005
- 256 political groups and 18,900 candidates registered
- In 2005, Iraqis voted according to their ethnic group: Sunni Arab, Shiite Arab or Kurd
- Despite al-Qai’da threats, voter turnout almost 60% and elections saw little violence; Iraqis very proud of results
- Iraqi constitution, written in 2004 and ratified in 2005, requires that women hold 25% of parliament seats
Images from the December 2005 elections
Arab Provincial Legislative elections, 2009

- In Jan. 31, 2009 Arab Provincial Legislative elections Iraqi voters chose *services* over sectarianism.
- Biggest loser was the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (ISCI) that sought to manipulate religious symbols.
- Secular parties that emphasized services big winners.
- High turnout rates (40-65%) and voting patterns show that Iraqis are *pragmatic* in their political choices.
- *New parties/candidates* point to a strong civil society and interest in politics which fueled 2009 elections.
The KRG Assembly Elections, 7/25/09

- That Change (Gorran) List won 25% of vote, and Services and Reform List won 10% of vote was a major step forward to making KRG more democratic
- Campaign shows how civil society provides basis for fighting KRG’s authoritarianism and corruption
- Role of youth and educated middle classes was key in challenging 2 dominant parties in KRG: KDP and PUK
- New opposition parliament members have tried to provide checks and balances against KRG’s authoritarianism and misuse of public funds
The significance of the KRG Parliament elections

- KRG’s ability to manipulate Kurds against Arab Iraq has declined
- Political cleavages have changed from setting Kurds against Arabs, to the Kurdish populace vs. its own Kurdish political elite
- Similarities between al-Maliki government and KRG leadership have become more apparent, i.e., corruption and authoritarian rule
The March 2010 parliament elections

- Voters gave the *secular* al-Iraqiya List 91 seats, compared to 89 for al-Maliki’s State of Law Coalition and 54 for National Iraqi Alliance.

- Two main religious clerics, Shiite and Sunni (al-Sistani and al-Samarra’i), prevented Maliki from postponing elections and forced him to use *open list* system.

- Open-list system fostered *transparency* and allowed *independent* women to win seat.
The March 2010 parliament elections

- Prior to elections, many sectarian politicians abandoned sectarian politics to form *cross-ethnic coalitions*

- Average national turnout reached 62.4%, with voter turnout over 70% in Kurdish region

- Iraqi High Election Commission and foreign observers indicated that elections were fair

- Maliki’s court challenge failed to overturn results
Electioneering for March 2010 parliament vote
The role of women in Iraqi elections

2 posters for Fayruz Hatim, UNA
Iraqi politics today
How has politics evolved since 2010?

- Despite peaceful elections in 2005, 2009 and 2010, political elite suffers from intense *internal conflict* and *competition*

- Ayad Allawi is resentful that he was not been allowed to form a government despite al-Iraqiya winning majority of seats in March 2010 elections

- His “consolation prize” was to become president of a new National Council for Strategic Affairs (NCSA), proposed by US

- IG cannot implement any major new policies – creating jobs and improving services - as long as crisis between Maliki and Allawi persists
The Kurds as “Power brokers”?

- The Kurds initially welcomed the power vacuum created by the Maliki-Allawi rift because they saw themselves as potential kingmakers in resolving the rift.

- Now they have changed their view as they see the negative consequences of the conflict.

- Pres. Talabani has called on Maliki to cede powers to NCSA and allow al-Iraqiya to help in choosing the defense & interior ministers.
The Rise of the Shiite militias

- Elite conflict and withdrawal US/UK forces has allowed militias to emerge in southern Iraq
- Militias are encouraged and supported by Iran
- Lack of jobs and rising rural-urban migration, given water shortages, provides new recruits
- Militias threaten IG authority in south and intimidate government representatives
- By producing gridlock, *elite crisis* strengthens militias and radical elements throughout Iraq
Has the “Arab Spring affected Iraq?

- The Arab Spring has encouraged Iraqis, esp. youth (Arab and Kurdish) to demand change
- Weekly demonstrations occur in Baghdad, Sulaimaniya, and other Iraqi cities, and demonstrators have been killed and wounded
- Arab Spring has encouraged Iraqis to expand the number of civil society organizations
- Arab Spring shows Iraqis want more personal freedoms and a more responsive government
Arabs and Kurds demonstrate for more democracy

International community needs to support democratic aspirations of the Iraqi people
Corruption and Iraqi democracy

- Iraq’s most serious problem is lack of jobs, sub-standard government services and massive corruption, not sectarianism.
- Iraq’s political parties “divide up the spoils”.
- All ministries provide patronage that is dispensed by the party that controls a particular ministry.
- Iraqis resent the lack of jobs and services despite Iraq’s extensive wealth from oil and natural gas.
- Iraq is #175 of 180 on the NGO Transparency International’s List of most corrupt countries.
The Public Opinion Environment
All sects see democracy as improving quality of life

- Making Iraq more democratic will likely improve services and our quality of life.
- Making Iraq more democratic would likely make services worse and hurt our quality of life.

![Bar Chart]

- Total: 61% support, 20% oppose
- Kurds: 75% support, 12% oppose
- Shia: 70% support, 18% oppose
- Sunni: 64% support, 16% oppose
Now, I am going to read you a list of concerns that some people may have. Please tell me which TWO of these are the most important for the government to address.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jobs and unemployment</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic services (electricity and water)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High prices</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sectarianism</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure development</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How many times per week did you attend the Friday prayer (*khutba*) in the last month?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ages 12-18</th>
<th>Ages 18-25</th>
<th>Ages 25-30</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>72.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Times</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>9.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Times</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus groups conducted by Eric Davis with 600 Iraqi Youth – ages 12-30 (November 2010 – March 2011), with a grant from the *United States Institute of Peace*
# How would you identify yourself religiously?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ages 12-18</th>
<th>Ages 18-25</th>
<th>Ages 25-30</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>21.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>63.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do you prefer to belong to a political party?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ages 12-18</th>
<th>Ages 18-25</th>
<th>Ages 25-30</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>11.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>89.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How much do you feel young people’s lives have improved?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ages 12-18</th>
<th>Ages 18-25</th>
<th>Ages 25-30</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very much</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>23.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>30.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not much</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>27.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>17.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What sources do Iraqi youth trust for news?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iraqi</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>22.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Non-Iraqi</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>33.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western-based</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>26.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If given the opportunity, would you leave Iraq permanently?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ages 12-18</th>
<th>Ages 18-25</th>
<th>Ages 25-30</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>31.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>57.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do you think we can find a balance between Western and Middle Eastern cultural views?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Ages 18-25</th>
<th>Ages 25-30</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>24.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>33.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>43.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table suggests need for greater interaction between US, EU and foreign NGOs and Iraqi youth.
Iraqis show strong support for democracy

- From the citizens’ perspective, Iraq appears well placed to make a transition to democracy
- Voter turnout, political participation, and public opinion polls all show support for democracy
- Voting patterns suggest support for sectarianism is on the decline
- However, the al-Maliki government remains dysfunctional and corrupt
- If corruption continues and key services are not forthcoming, support for democracy could be undermined (remember instability of 1960s)
Whither Iraq?
Scenarios for the future
Worse case scenarios

- The worse case scenario is an Iraq paralyzed by elite conflict, as corruption and lack of services continue
- Iran and radical Sunni elements in KSA and Arab Gulf benefit from the stalled transition to democracy
- Armed militias challenge the IG’s authority in rural areas and poor urban quarters
- Instability undermines foreign investment
- Progress fails to be made in the oil and gas sectors, both in terms of exploration and their modernization
A new authoritarianism?

- PM Nuri al-Maliki has undermined the process of democratization
- He has sought to control the Independent Higher Electoral Commission, the Central Bank and influence way in which judiciary adjudicates cases
- PM al-Maliki has created special military units that only report to him
- He threatened a parliamentarian, Sabah al-Saadi, with 7 years imprisonment for criticizing him
- His policies show little respect for Rule of Law
Will US influence decline?

- Even though US will withdraw most if not all troops by 12/31/11, US still will have influence in Iraq.
- It will help Iraq build its air force and train its army and security services.
- It will promote Iraqi interests in international financial institutions and conferences.
- US will facilitate relations with Saudi Arabia and Arab Gulf states and provide counterweight to Iran.
- US needs to use its influence, to push al-Maliki government to take seriously in Iraq.
What is the impact of “neighborhood effects”?  

- Iraq lives in a dangerous neighborhood 
- None of Iraq’s neighbors wants Iraq to become a democracy based on tolerance and pluralism 
- Iranian regime sees Iraq as threat to its control over its majority Shiite population 
- KSA sees Iraq providing model for its own Shiite population which lives in oil rich areas 
- Syria sees democratic Iraq as further eroding support for Bashar al-Assad’s Baathist regime
Turkey as a “good neighbor”

- Turkey has invested heavily in Iraq
- Turkey works to create closer ties with KRG
- Both Turkey and KRG was to suppress PKK radicals who attack Turkey from Iraq mountains
- Turkey is working with Iraq to try and ease Iraq’s sever water shortage problems
- Turkey and Iraq are cooperating to build the Nabucco natural gas pipeline
Turkey and Iraq cooperate to build Nabucco Pipeline to take Iraqi natural gas to Europe
The “Libyan” plot

- When National Transitional Council seized Libyan capital, Tripoli, in August, discovered Qaddafi plot to help bring Ba'ath back to power
- Former NTC PM Mahmud Jibril flew to Baghdad to inform Nuri al-Maliki of plot
- Maliki used word of plot to dismiss many Sunni Arabs from government posts, e.g., 145 professors from Tikrit University fired
Plot has inflamed sectarian tensions

- Sunni Arabs say plot overblown by Maliki
- They argue it has become an excuse to get rid of Sunnis who he doesn’t like
- Maliki replies he must protect Iraq’s security
- Tensions inflamed just as US troops leaving
- Tensions have encouraged Sunni Arab provinces to call for forming autonomous region like KRG
Could Iraq fragment?

- Elite crisis in Baghdad could promote Iraq’s fragmentation into 3 mini states
- Iraq’s Sunni Arab provinces have asked to become a separate region
- KRG is nervous about remaining part of Iraq without US protection
- Better ties with Turkey and Iran could create incentive to declare independence
- Such action would leave rump Shiite state in south
Summary comments

- Iraqi democracy is at a crucial turning point
- If Nuri al-Maliki doesn’t promote national reconciliation, Iraq’s fragmentation could result
- US, EU, UN and Turkey are key actors in assuring that Iraq does not fragment
- Further instability in Iraq would have negative consequences for a shaky global economy
- Instability favors Iranian expansionism
- Iraqis and international; community need to actively support expansion of democracy in Iraq
Bibliography

Davis E., editor, and author of “Introduction” to special issue on the “question of sectarian identities in Iraq,” *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, Fall 2010; available at: [http://fas-polisci.rutgers.edu](http://fas-polisci.rutgers.edu)
