Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack

Democracy in Iraq?

What should the government of Iraq after Saddam Hussein look like? The U.S. government has worked feverishly to address the problem—creating working groups and planning cells, formulating options, and discussing ideas with U.S. allies while pundits and analysts in the media, think tanks, and academia have further identified this issue as a vital one to ensure that peace in Iraq and in the region is secured.

Democracy lies at the heart of all of these discussions. President George W. Bush himself declared, "All Iraqis must have a voice in the new government, and all citizens must have their rights protected."[1] As members of a prosperous democratic society, U.S. citizens innately believe that democracy would be good for Iraqis too. The most optimistic have even offered a vision of a future Iraq as a "City on the Hill" for the Arab world that would inspire democracy throughout the Middle East and beyond.[2]

Yet, skeptics abound. Adam Garfinkle, for example, argues that even trying to build democracy in the Arab world would not only fail but also further stoke anti-Americanism in the process.[3] Overall, critics raise at least five related objections to creating a democratic Iraq that seem damning at first blush. First, they contend that acceptable alternatives to democracy exist for Iraq that, if hardly ideal, are more feasible and more likely to ensure the stability and cohesiveness of the country. Second, they argue that Iraq is not ready for democracy. Third, they state that Iraqi society is too fragmented for democracy to take hold. Even if Iraq held elections or had other outward institutions of democracy, in practice such a system would yield an

Daniel L. Byman is an assistant professor in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University and a nonresident senior fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. Kenneth M. Pollack is director of research at the Saban Center and author of *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq.*

illiberal result such as a tyranny of the Shi'a majority. Fourth, they insist that the transition to democracy in Iraq would be too perilous and the resulting government too weak; thus, the institutionalization of democracy, particularly a federal form of it, would fail. Critics often conjure a vision of an Iraq beset by civil strife with rival communities seeking revenge on one another while neighboring armies trample the country. Finally, they assert that the United States is too fickle, and the Iraqis too hostile, to give democracy the time it would need to grow and bear fruit. Overall, primarily for these five reasons, the doubters do not so much question the desirability of democracy in Iraq as they do its feasibility.

Claiming that building democracy in Iraq after the U.S.-led war to depose Saddam would be easy or certain—let alone that doing so might solve all of the problems of the Middle East overnight—would be foolish. Nevertheless, the arguments advanced by skeptics exaggerate the impediments to building democracy and ignore the potential impact that a determined United States could have on this effort. Iraq is hardly ideal soil for growing democracy, but it is not as infertile as other places where democracy has taken root. Iraq's people are literate, and the country's potential wealth is considerable. A properly designed federal system stabilized by U.S. and other intervening powers' military forces could both satisfy Iraq's myriad communities and ensure order and security. Creating democracy in Iraq would require a long-term U.S. commitment, but the United States has made similar commitments to far less strategic parts of the world. Creating a democracy in Iraq would not be quick, easy, or certain, but it should not be impossible either.

No Other Choice

Perhaps the most compelling reason to invest in building democracy in a post-Saddam Iraq is that the alternatives are far worse. Those who oppose such an effort have offered two alternatives: an oligarchy that incorporates Iraq's leading communities or a new, gentler dictatorship. Although not pleasant, skeptics of democracy argue that the United States must be "realistic" and recognize that only these options would avoid chaos and ensure Iraq's stability. That either of these approaches could offer a stable and desirable alternative to the lengthy process of building democracy from the bottom up, however, is highly doubtful.

CONSOCIATIONAL OLIGARCHY

One of the most commonly suggested forms for a post-Saddam Iraqi government would be one roughly similar to the new Karzai regime in Afghanistan.

A consociational oligarchy would theoretically bring together leading figures from all of Iraq's major ethnic, religious, tribal, geographic, and functional groupings in a kind of national unity government. Such a regime might not be pluralistic in a strict sense; but by including members from all strata of Iraqi society, it would at least represent its key elements, and the various members could be expected to protect the most basic interests of their co-religionists and ethnic kin. Whether or not these groups truly represented the interests and aspirations of the Iraqi people would be largely irrelevant. Advocates of a consociational oligarchy in Iraq maintain that, with the demise of Saddam's regime, tribal chieftains and religious leaders can be expected to emerge as the only forces left in Iraq with some degree of power and would therefore be best able to preserve stability.

> Iraq is not as infertile a soil for democracy as other places where it has taken root.

A consociational oligarchy would be difficult to establish for the simple reason that Iraq currently lacks potential oligarchs. Before Saddam took power, Iraq had numerous tribal, religious, military, municipal, and merchant leaders of sufficient stature to exercise considerable independent power. "Had" is the key word. Because Saddam ruthlessly eliminated any leaders in the country with the potential to rival himself, strong local leaders are lacking. Those who remain in the armed forces, in the Sunni tribes, and among some of the Shi'ite militias and religious figures are political pygmies, lacking anything resembling the kind of independent power needed to dominate the country. The armed forces, particularly the Republican Guard, had the power to rule the country, but they have been decimated and fragmented by the U.S. military offensive.

Meanwhile, 75 percent of the population is urban, and even those city-dwellers who retain some links to their tribes reportedly do not want to be represented by unsophisticated, rural shaykhs who know nothing about life in Iraq's cities. Nor do these mostly secular Iraqis want to be represented by clerics whose goals might be very different from their own. So, who would represent the urban lower and middle classes that constitute the bulk of Iraq's population? Not the former magistrates of Iraq's cities—these are all appointees of Saddam's regime who owed their positions to their loyalty and service to him. In short, without a democratic process that would allow new leaders to emerge from the greater Iraqi population, the vast majority of Iraqis would be left without a voice.

By failing to include so much of Iraq's populace, attempts at a consociational oligarchy will only foster the potential for instability down the road.

Although the current Kurdish leaders could represent their population well because they have led them for years and are widely—though not universally—accepted, they would be the exception. The few members of the Shi'ite clergy who have survived Saddam's purges could represent Shi'ites who favor an Islamic form of government, but they reportedly constitute less than 15 percent of the Shi'ite population in Iraq. Shi'ite shaykhs could represent their small tribal constituencies, just as Sunni shaykhs could represent their followers; but tribal Iraqis—both Sunni and Shi'a—now comprise just a small fraction of the population, probably less than 15 percent. An oligarchic approach thus risks almost immediate chaos by increasing the chances that a form of warlordism would develop in which local leaders might be strong enough to resist any weak central government that would surely emerge with such an approach, as was the case in Afghanistan, but not strong enough to hold the country together.

> The United States has made similar commitments to far less strategic parts of the world.

To the extent that various groups and their warlords did cooperate in a new political structure created by the United States before coalition troops departed, they likely would do so only temporarily to prevent their rivals from gaining control of the central government, to try to gain control of the central government themselves, and to secure as much of the country's resources for themselves as possible. Moreover, this approach would inevitably include the cleansing of other tribal, ethnic, and religious groups as warlords attempted to consolidate control of their territory. Meanwhile, in the Shi'ite south, with no strong central government imposing order, the Shi'a would likely vent their pent-up anger over eight decades of Sunni repression with reprisal killings against Sunnis associated with the past regime. Imagining a consociational oligarchy that fostered stability, let alone good government, in Iraq is difficult.

A New Dictatorship

A far simpler alternative to democracy would be merely to install a new dictator to take Saddam's place. In effect, this would entail the United States acquiescing in the establishment of just one more Arab autocracy that, hopefully, would be no more troubling than that of Hosni Mubarak's Egypt.

In addition to the moral burden of forcing long-suffering Iraqis to again endure dictatorship, this hard-line approach is not practical because the power brokers left standing after Saddam's fall are simply too weak to take or hold power forcibly themselves without constant and heavy-handed U.S. in-

terference. Lacking Saddam's military power, any who try will provoke civil war when they attack but be unable to defeat the military forces of their domestic rivals. To make matters worse, each faction would probably appeal to foreign countries such as Iran or Syria to help defend themselves and gain control over the country.

Because a U.S.-anointed successor to Saddam would find holding power difficult without outside support, the most likely outcome of this approach would be a revolving-door dictatorship in which one weak autocrat is overthrown by the next, who then is himself too weak to hang on. Indeed, the only way that another dictator would have a chance of maintaining power would be to become a new version of Saddam himself—replicating his predecessor's brutal tyranny and even possibly resurrecting the development of weapons of mass destruction, flouting UN resolutions, supporting terrorism, and attacking neighboring countries, none of which would enhance the stability of the region or advance U.S. interests.

At best, a new dictatorship would leave Iraq no better off than other regional autocracies, but this too would be a dangerous result. Under such a dictatorship, Iraq might—as Saudi Arabia and Egypt have—become a breeding ground for anti-U.S. Islamic radicals or might slide into instability, even revolution. Setting post-Saddam Iraq on this path would be folly. Saddling another strategically important Middle Eastern state with all of the same problems as Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and the others is not an outcome that the United States should seek.

Difficult but Not Impossible

The second principal criticism leveled by the skeptics of democracy for Iraq is that Iraq is too much of a basket case for it ever to become a democracy. As Middle East expert Chris Sanders argues, "There isn't a society in Iraq to turn into a democracy"[4]—a view shared by a range of experts interviewed by journalist James Fallows. This pessimism contains grains of truth. Building democracy in Iraq will not be easy, straightforward, or guaranteed; others have failed under more propitious circumstances. Moreover, building democracy in Iraq will be a long and laborious process, if it succeeds at all. No particular reason, however, exists to believe that creating a workable democracy in Iraq would be impossible. In this respect, the skeptics have exaggerated the obstacles.

The claim that the historical absence of democracy in Iraq precludes its development today can be easily refuted by the fact that many democracies that have developed within the last 20 years—some with more problems than others—lacked a prior democratic tradition. Any new democracy has

to start somewhere. After World War II, many Americans and Europeans believed that Germans were unsuited to democracy because they were culturally bred—if not genetically predisposed—to autocracy, and they pointed to the failure of the Weimar Republic as proof. The same claim was made about several East Asian countries, whose Confucian values supposedly required a consensus and uniformity inimical to democracy. White South Africans similarly argued that their black compatriots were somehow unequipped to participate in the democratic process. The British often said the same about India before independence. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, democracy has broken out across Eastern Europe, and in some cases it has been a relatively quick success (e.g., Poland, Estonia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary) and in other cases a disappointment (e.g., Belarus). In virtually all of these countries, however, and in dozens of others around the world, democracy may remain a work in progress, but it is not hopeless.

> The alternatives to democracy in post-Saddam Iraq are far worse.

IRAQ'S FOUNDATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY

The various socioeconomic indicators that academics use to assess the probability of democracy succeeding also suggest that Iraq has a reasonably good foundation to make the transition.[5] As Table 1 indicates, in key categories such as per capita income, literacy, male-to-female literacy ratio, and urbanization, Iraq's numbers are comparable to those of many other states that have enjoyed real progress in the transition from autocracy to democracy, such as Bangladesh, Kenya, and Bolivia.

Critics correctly point out that the above statistics are correlates, not causes; simply possessing a certain gross domestic product (GDP) or literacy rate does not automatically lead a country to democracy. Yet, the same uncertainty about what causes democracy also applies to what hinders it. Scholars have some insights into the process, but time and again history has surprised us. Democracy has sprung up in the most unlikely of places: sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and South as well as Southeast Asia.

Some noteworthy democratic successes in the Kurdish part of northern Iraq further belie the criticism that Iraq cannot become democratic. Beset by infighting and economic dislocation, among other problems, the Kurds have nonetheless established a reasonably stable form of power sharing. Corruption and tribalism remain problematic, but Iraqi Kurdistan has progressed greatly. At local levels, elections have been free and competitive, the press has considerable freedom, basic civil liberties are secure, and the bureaucracies are re-

Table I. Socioeconomic Indicators Linked to Democracy: Selected Countries

Country	Positive Factors					Negative Factors	
	Per Capita GDP *(PPP)*	Basic Education *(Literacy: Percent of population age 15 and higher)*				Economic Inequality *(Gini Index)*	Urban Population *(Percent of total)*
		Total	Male	Female	Male-Female Gap		
Bangladesh	$1,750	56	63	49	–14	33.6	22
Bolivia	2,600	83.1	90.5	76	–14.5	58.9	60
East Timor	500	48	NA	NA	NA	38	24
Egypt	3,700	51.4	63.6	38.8	–24.8	28.9	44
India	2,500	52	65.5	37.7	–27.8	37.8	27
Indonesia	3,000	83.8	89.6	78	–11.6	31.7	36
Iraq	2,500	58	70.7	45	–25.7	NA *	75
Kenya	1,000	78.1	86.3	70	–16.3	44.5	29
Jordan	4,200	86.6	93.4	79.4	–14	36.4	71
Mongolia	1,770	97.8	98	97.5	–0.5	33.2	61
Nigeria	840	57.1	67.3	47.3	–20	50.6	40
Panama	5,900	90.8	91.4	90.2	–1.2	48.5	55
Peru	4,800	88.3	94.5	83	–11.5	46.2	71
Philippines	4,000	94.6	95	94.3	–0.7	46.2	54
Romania	6,800	97	98	95	–3	30.5	55
Senegal	1,580	39.1	51.1	28.9	–22.2	41.3	44
Turkey	6,700	85	94	77	–17	41.5	69

Notes: NA=not available
* (High)
Sources: World Bank, "East Timor at a Glance," for East Timor urban population; United Nations InfoNation for urban population of other countries; CIA World Factbook for all other figures.

sponsive to popular concerns and surprisingly accountable. Pluralism—if not full-fledged democracy—is working in Iraqi Kurdistan and working well.

Iraq, in fact, has a number of advantages that would contribute to a successful democracy-building effort; namely, it is perhaps the best endowed of any of the Arab states in terms of both its physical and societal attributes. In addition to its vast oil wealth, Iraq also has tremendous agricultural potential. Prior to the Persian Gulf War, its population was probably the best educated, most secular, and most progressive of all the Arab states. Although it has been devastated economically over the past 12 years, Iraq has many lawyers, doctors, and professors. Together, they could constitute the base of a resurgent Iraqi middle class and thus an important building block of democracy.

Moreover, across the Middle East, popular stirrings indicate the desire for democracy among many people throughout the region. Within the strict parameters of Syrian control, Lebanon once again has a fairly vibrant pluralistic system, while Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Yemen have all instituted democratic changes that appear to be building momentum for greater reforms. If poorer, more traditional societies in the Middle East can take steps toward democracy, surely Iraq can take them as well.

LESSONS FROM OTHER RECENT INTERVENTIONS

A further advantage Iraq would have over other states in a transition to democracy is that U.S. resources would back it up, hopefully along with the assistance of the United Nations and other international organizations. During the last 15 years, numerous efforts to establish democracy after a major international intervention suggest that the same is possible for Iraq. In 1996, after the Dayton peace accords were signed, NATO and the UN created an extensive new program to rebuild Bosnia. Early efforts were disjointed, but the program improved over time. Although Bosnia was hardly a model democracy, by as early as 1998 the U.S. Department of State could brag that Bosnia's GDP had doubled, unemployment was falling, basic services had been restored throughout the country, an independent media was thriving, and public elections had been held for all levels of government.[6]

The Bosnia model was refined and reemployed in Kosovo in 1999 after hostilities ceased, where it worked better because lessons learned in Bosnia were heeded. In particular, the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo planned and coordinated the efforts of international organizations better.[7] The same approach was even more successfully applied in East Timor, where a functional—albeit nascent—democracy is essentially now a reality.

Panama provides another interesting example of U.S. efforts to build democracy. Like Iraq, Panama before 1989 had never experienced anything other than pseudodemocracy in the form of meaningless elections that the ruling junta invalidated whenever it desired. After the U.S. invasion in 1989, the United States instituted Operation Promote Liberty to rebuild Panama economically and politically. Although postinvasion reconstruction in Panama had its fair share of mistakes and inadequacies, Panama today is not doing badly at all. Getting there took roughly 10 years, but it happened.[8]

None of the examples above offers a perfect model for a post-Saddam Iraq. Yet, together they indicate that intervening forces can reduce strife and foster power sharing and that reform movements can blossom in seemingly infertile ground.

Imagining a Democratic Iraq

Still others who argue against the possibility of democracy in Iraq claim that the nation's unique problems, such as its dangerous neighborhood or explosive communal mix, will pervert elections, freedom of speech, or other democratic building blocks and thus produce illiberal results. Even states with the right foundation can fail if the constitutional system it develops does not match its needs. The failure of the Weimar Republic in Germany, for example, was at least in part the result of a poorly designed democratic system, not the inability of Germans to be democratic. The very features of Iraqi society that make it so difficult to govern and make it unlikely that any system other than a democratic one could ensure stability also demand a democratic system capable of dealing with its serious internal contradictions.

> Building democracy in Iraq will be a long and laborious process, if it succeeds at all.

The greatest obstacle to democracy in Iraq is the potential for one group—particularly Iraq's majority Shi'a community—to dominate the country. This problem is not unique to Iraq; it has plagued democracies since their modern inception. As James Madison wrote in 1787:

> Complaints are everywhere heard from our most considerate and virtuous citizens, equally the friends of public and private faith, and of public and personal liberty, that our governments are too unstable, that the public good is disregarded in the conflicts of rival parties, and that measures are too often decided, not according to the rules of justice and the rights of the minor party, but by the superior force of an interested and overbearing majority.[9]

For Madison, the answer was to be found through the cross-cutting identities of U.S. citizens, but Saddam's manipulation of Iraq's ethnic, tribal, and religious divisions have weakened, but not obliterated, such bonds. Thus, the fear is that Iraq's Shi'ite community, which comprises more than 60 percent of the population, might use free elections to transform its current exclusion from power to one of total dominance. Knowing this, Sunni Arabs, and perhaps the Kurds as well, might oppose a majority rule–based system. Thus, the key for an Iraqi democracy will be to fashion a system that addresses the potential problem of a tyranny of the majority.

Envisioning a form of democracy able to cope with Iraq's political problems is, in fact, quite possible. Perhaps surprisingly, a democratic system with some similarities to the U.S. system would appear to best fit the bill. Iraq needs a democratic system that encourages compromise and cooperation

among members of otherwise well-defined groupings. Features of Iraqi democracy should include:

- Defining the rights of every individual and limiting trespasses by the central government. In particular, the freedom of language and of religious expression should be expressly noted.

- Declaring that all powers not reserved to the federal government be vested in local governments to constrain the central government further.

- Creating an additional set of checks and balances within the structure of the federal government to limit its powers and particularly to limit the ability of any group to manipulate it to repress other members of Iraqi society.

- Electing a president indirectly, to ensure that different communities have a say in who is chosen. In particular, Iraq should look to other systems (such as Malaysia's) that strive to ensure that candidates are acceptable to multiple constituencies and are not simply imposed on the country by the largest group.

- Employing a system of representation in the legislature that is determined by geography—not pure party affiliation as in many parliamentary systems—to encourage cooperation across ethnic and religious lines.

This last point is an important one in thinking about Iraqi democracy. Although the locations of communities are fairly well correlated to geography (i.e., the Kurds live in the north, the Shi'a in the south, and the Sunnis in the west), there are also important regions of overlap. In Baghdad and in large chunks of central Iraq, Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurds all live together. By insisting on a system of geographically determined representation, Iraqi legislators elected from these mixed districts would have an incentive to find compromise solutions to national problems to try to please their mixed constituencies rather than just one particular community of Iraqis.

Indeed, this points out one of the great risks of a poorly designed parliamentary system—and one of proportional representation in particular—for Iraq. By emphasizing party membership based on communal identity in determining legislative elections, the legislators themselves would have less incentive to try to reach compromises across party lines and much more incentive to follow party ideology slavishly—a system that would tend to push legislators to extremes. Iraqis instead need a system that encourages them to move toward the center and compromise. The U.S. system of geographic representation has become almost infamous for this tendency, so

much so that distinguishing among candidates on Election Day is often impossible because they all cling so desperately to the middle ground.

A key difference from a U.S.-style system would be embracing the reality of Iraq's separate and diverse ethnic, tribal, and religious communities—and both working with them and weakening their political influence at the same time. If the electoral system is properly designed, it can also foster moderation, leaving firebrands isolated and out of power. One technique championed by scholar Donald Horowitz is to create political incentives for cross-community cooperation.[10] Malaysia, for example, has successfully overcome tension between Malays, ethnic Chinese, and ethnic Indians using an integrative model that relies on electoral incentives to foster cooperation. Malaysia's system succeeded in part because the country had experienced ethnic violence in the past, which its political leaders then sought to avoid—a possible parallel to Iraq.

> The greatest obstacle is the potential for one group to dominate the country.

Shepherding the Transition

Because a newborn Iraqi democracy organized on the model sketched above would inevitably begin from a position of weakness, the international community, particularly the United States, must play midwife for democracy to flourish. Even if all goes well, the new government will need years to gain the trust of its people, demonstrate its ability to maintain order and broker compromises, and foster the maturation of democratic institutions. Indeed, the fourth criticism of democracy in Iraq is that even a government designed to ensure that all of Iraq's communities have a voice will not be able to withstand the challenges it will face in its critical early years.

Because Saddam nurtured intercommunal hatred, minor provocations could spiral out of control and spark internecine conflicts in the early months after his fall. As has frequently occurred elsewhere around the world, chauvinistic leaders of all of Iraq's communities might exploit a weak, new government by using their newfound freedoms of speech and assembly to stir up hatred without any penalty. Some groups, particularly the Kurds, might take advantage of a new state's weakness to press for secession. Those who became rich and powerful under the Ba'th regime might use their initial advantages to ensure their continued dominance by ignoring election results. Americans expect losers in elections to leave office gracefully—or at least just to leave. This expectation of a peaceful departure, however, is not

universal. Building democratic institutions depends on creating mutual expectations of cooperation and nonaggression both among leaders and the electorate, but developing these expectations requires time and peace to take root.

A weak federal government that was not protected by the United States would also increase the danger of regional strife. Iraq's neighbors have a history of meddling and could take advantage of any weakness to protect their own interests. Turkey may intervene economically, politically, or militarily to ensure that Iraqi Kurds remain weak and do not support Kurdish insurgents within Turkey itself. Ankara already maintains several thousand troops in Iraq to fight its own Kurdish insurgency. Iran may champion its partisans within Iraq's Shi'a community, either by providing them with armed support from Iraqi dissidents residing in Iran or by covertly working with Iraqi Shi'a leaders. Different communities may organize in response to, or in support of, perceived meddling, even when little exists.

These concerns are real, but they are not unmanageable. Critics tend to overlook the success of other international efforts at performing precisely this role in democratic transitions elsewhere around the world. The UN, the United States, and the coalition of U.S. allies will have to help the new Iraqi government fend off these challenges until it has developed the institutional strength to handle them itself. Minimizing the risks of civil strife, meddling neighbors, and other barriers to successful institutionalization will require the United States to push for and then staunchly back an international effort to address Iraq's political, diplomatic, and security efforts.

Providing security is an essential task for intervening powers. Without internal security, the political process will be badly distorted if not entirely undermined, humanitarian relief becomes impossible, and economic recovery a will o' the wisp. Even in places where the transition to democracy has been rocky, such as Bosnia, a strong international presence has had great success in preserving the peace. The Australian-led effort in East Timor was even more successful—if only because the situation was, in some ways, more challenging—and could provide a good model for a U.S.-led effort in Iraq.

By leading a multinational force of initially at least 100,000 troops with a strong mandate to act throughout Iraq, the United States and its coalition partners will have an excellent prospect of ensuring the degree of security necessary for a successful transition to democracy. In essence, the goal for the U.S.-led peacekeeping force would be to ensure that no group or individual uses violence for political advantage. International security forces will reassure Iraq's Shi'a and Kurdish communities that repression at the hands of Iraqi Sunnis is at an end. Equally important, the presence of these foreign troops would reassure Iraqi Sunnis that the end of their monopoly

on power does not mean their persecution and repression, minimizing their incentives to oppose the process. The presence of multinational troops could prevent small incidents from snowballing and thus could help create the expectation of peace within Iraq—an instrumental factor in making peace a reality.

Such a U.S.-led security force would likely affect all aspects of political transition profoundly and discourage, if not eliminate, most efforts to subvert the process by, most obviously, preventing the cancellation or disruption of elections and other elements of democratic institution-building. Preventing hate speech, warmongering, and chauvinism will be more challenging, but tremendous room for influence still exists. By ensuring domestic security and deterring foreign aggression, leaders will find playing on people's fears to gain power far more difficult.

> The international community, particularly the United States, must play midwife if democracy is to flourish.

The diplomatic dimension is relatively straightforward. The United States and other concerned powers should encourage Iraq's neighbors to facilitate peace and democratic transition in Iraq and, should this encouragement fail, deter them from intervening. Although autocracies such as the Gulf oil monarchies and other Arab states might be uncomfortable with U.S.-guided democracy in Iraq, stability in Iraq is the overwhelming priority for every single one of them. Thus, the argument that the alternative to democracy is probably not the Sunni strongman they may desire, but warlordism and civil war, will likely prove persuasive. Indeed, in conversations with officials from various Gulf states, we found surprisingly wide recognition of this fear.

Tehran, of course, would be highly concerned about a large U.S. military presence in Iraq and would prefer a pro-Iranian (or at least nonhostile) regime in Baghdad. The presence of a large U.S. troop component within the security force, however, would act as a strong deterrent to Iranian meddling, particularly given the poor condition of Iran's military. At least since Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's death, Tehran has acted cautiously and tried to avoid provocations that might result in U.S. military action.

With Turkey, the situation is more complicated, but the United States still has considerable leverage. Even though relations became strained before the war began, the United States has tremendous influence with Turkey—economically, geostrategically, and as a result of their shared interests in the region. The Europeans possess great influence particularly because of

Turkey's bid for membership in the European Union (EU), although skeptical Turks may question when this long-sought goal will ever become a reality. Washington also has enormous influence with the Kurds, who recognize that only the United States has the power and the will to protect their interests in a new, post-Saddam Iraq. The United States and the EU will thus be able to press both the Kurds and the Turks to reach compromises short of warfare. By convincing the Kurds and others to respect Ankara's concerns regarding northern Iraq, the United States and the EU would greatly reduce Turkey's incentives to interfere in Iraqi politics. In fact, Turkey's readiness to intervene provides Washington with considerable leverage to ensure that the Kurds do not press for secession—because the Kurds understand that the United States will not defend them if they try to secede.

The Singular Importance of the United States

Although the reconstruction of Iraq should be undertaken within a UN or some other international framework that reassures both the Iraqi people and the rest of the world, the United States nonetheless must actively lead the effort. If Washington shirks this responsibility, the mission will fail.

A security force composed mostly of allied troops or run by the UN in Iraq—as opposed to a strong command structure under UN auspices as was established in East Timor—would lack credibility. Iraq's neighbors, particularly Iran, might play off of fissures in the coalition's relationships to bolster their own influence. Internally, if control of the peacekeeping mission is split among different coalition members, different peacekeeping forces would employ different tactics and rules of engagement, allowing hard-liners in some sectors to foment discord.

Taking the reins of postconflict reconstruction in Iraq does not mean that the United States need retain large forces in Iraq forever. As soon as the security situation is calm and under control, the United States should place its operations under the UN's aegis (though not its control), hopefully as part of a larger international reconstruction effort for Iraq's political and economic sectors. This situation, in turn, should last for several years as the UN, nongovernmental organizations, and multinational security forces gradually devolve the functions of government to a new Iraqi regime—with security last on the list.[11]

Only when a new democratic government has demonstrated that it can govern should the international community, including the United States, turn to a purely supportive role. Even then, the new regime may need U.S. help to ensure security. We can hope for a quick transition, but we should plan for a long one.

WILL THE UNITED STATES BE WELCOME?

Critics of pursuing democracy in a post-Saddam Iraq further maintain that the United States will not be capable of playing the role outlined above because a hostile Iraqi people would soon compel U.S. forces to leave Iraq. In the immediate aftermath of Saddam's regime fall, the picture is mixed. Much of Iraq is politically quiescent or quietly pro–United States. In several parts of Iraq, however, angry demonstrations against the U.S. occupation have already occurred, leading critics to say that Iraqis are rejecting the U.S. presence.

We should not rush to judgment. One should recall that, before Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Allied Force, conventional wisdom in the United States held that the highly nationalistic Afghans, Albanians, and others would not tolerate a long-term presence of outsiders. Today, however, these same people are in no hurry to have the foreigners depart.

> We can hope for a quick transition, but we should plan for a long one.

The United States would be wise to secure a UN Security Council resolution authorizing a U.S.-led effort within the UN system because a resolution would allow both potential Iraqi leaders and Iraq's neighbors to feel that they are working at the behest of the international community rather than that of Washington. East Timor may be the best model for this. Australian forces ensured order and took the lead on many of the most important aspects of reconstruction, but all within a well-supported UN framework. To demonstrate U.S. goodwill, the United States should move quickly to aid international efforts to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure and help Iraq expand oil production to its full potential. Moreover, during occupation, the U.S.-led security force should work with Iraqis whenever possible. Policing will require local language and local knowledge just as much as it will require U.S. muscle.

The best means of ensuring that a U.S. presence is welcome in Iraq is to make winning over the Iraqi people the number one U.S. mission, even at the price of other important goals. Restoring Iraq's oil infrastructure and using profits to meet Iraq's needs rather than to cover the costs of occupation is one immediate way to generate goodwill. Force protection, while important, should come second to ensuring that intervening forces mingle with the population, visibly help build schools and repair roads, and otherwise take the inevitable risks that are part of fostering a healthy relationship.

STAYING THE COURSE

A final argument against democratization for Iraq is that the United States' own lassitude will lead to an early withdrawal, leaving Iraq's democracy stillborn. The claim that the United States would not be willing to sustain a lengthy commitment has been made—and disproven—repeatedly. In his new history of U.S. decisionmaking about Germany after World War II, Michael Beschloss relays countless incidents in which senior U.S. policymakers, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt, asserted that the American people would not be willing to keep troops in Europe for more than one or two years. Beschloss quotes then-Senator Burton Wheeler (D-Mont.) charging that the American people would not tolerate a lengthy occupation of Europe, which he called a "seething furnace of fratricide, civil war, murder, disease, and starvation."[12] Similar statements are made about Iraq today by those who claim that the United States will not be willing to do what is necessary to help democracy flourish in Iraq.

In 1950, who would have believed that the United States would maintain troops in South Korea for more than 50 years? Before the U.S. intervention in Bosnia in 1995, many pundits claimed that occupying the Balkans, with its ancient ethnic and religious hatreds, would plunge the country into a quagmire, forcing the United States out, just as had happened in Lebanon and Vietnam. Yet, seven years later, U.S. forces are still in Bosnia. They have not taken a single casualty, and there is no public or private Bosnian clamor for them to leave. Furthermore, Iraq is far more important to the United States than Bosnia. Given the vital U.S. interests in a stable Persian Gulf, fears of U.S. fickleness seem sure to prove just as baseless for Iraq as they have for Germany, Japan, Korea, and Bosnia.

The Strategic Importance of a Stable, Democratic Iraq

Full-blown democracy in Iraq offers the best prospects for solving Iraq's problems over the long term for several reasons. Democracy would provide a means for Iraq's ethnic and religious groups for reconciling, or at least create political mechanisms for handling, divisions by means other than force. It would create a truly legitimate Iraqi government—one that did not repress any elements of the Iraqi people but instead worked for all of them. For the first time in Iraq's history, the government would serve to enrich its citizenry rather than enrich itself at its citizenry's expense.

Failure to establish democracy in Iraq, on the other hand, would be disastrous. Civil war, massive refugee flows, and even renewed interstate fighting would likely resurface to plague this long-cursed region. Moreover, should democracy fail to take root, this would add credence to charges that the

United States cares little for Muslim and Arab peoples—a charge that now involves security as well as moral considerations, as Washington woos the Muslim world in its war on terrorism. The failure to transform Iraq's government tarnished the 1991 military victory over Iraq; more than 10 years later, the United States must not make the same mistake.

Notes

1. George W. Bush, remarks before the American Enterprise Institute, February 27, 2003, located at www.foreignpolicy.org (electronic version).

2. James Fallows, "The Fifty-First State?" *Atlantic*, November 2002, pp. 53–64, www.theatlantic.com/issues/2002/11/fallows.htm (accessed April 5, 2003).

3. Adam Garfinkle, "The New Missionaries," *Prospect* (April 2003), pp. 22–24.

4. Fallows, "The Fifty-First State?"

5. See Robert J. Barro, "Determinants of Democracy," *Journal of Political Economy* 107, no. 6, pt. 2 (December 1999): 158–183.

6. For detailed accounts of the effort to rebuild Bosnia, see Marchus Cox, "State Building and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Lessons from Bosnia," *The Rehabilitation of War-Torn Societies*, January 2001 (project coordinated by the Centre for Applied Studies in International Negotiations); National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, "Europe: Central and Eastern: Bosnia-Herzegovina," www.ndi.org/worldwide/cee/bosnia/bosnia_pf.asp (accessed April 5, 2003) (updated June 2002); Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Summary of U.S. Government Policy on Bosnia," July 16, 1998, www.state.gov/www/regions/eur/fs_980716_bosqanda.html (accessed April 5, 2003).

7. For accounts of the effort to rebuild Kosovo, see Curt Tarnoff, "Kosovo: Reconstruction and Development Assistance," *CRS Report for Congress*, June 7, 2001; National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, "Europe: Central and Eastern: Yugoslavia: Kosovo," www.ndi.org/worldwide/cee/kosovo/kosovo_pf.asp (accessed April 5, 2003) (updated June 2002); Steven J. Woehrel and Julie Kim, "Kosovo and U.S. Policy," *CRS Report for Congress*, December 4, 2001; United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, "UNMIK at a Glance," www.unmikonline.org/intro.htm (accessed June 25, 2002).

8. On democratization in Panama, see William L. Furlong, "Panama: The Difficult Transition towards Democracy," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 35, no. 3 (autumn 1993): 19–64; Margaret E. Scranton, "Consolidation after Imposition: Panama's 1992 Referendum," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 35, no. 3 (autumn 1993): 65–102; Margaret E. Scranton, "Panama's First Post-Transition Election," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 37, no. 1 (spring 1995): 69–100; Karin Von Hippel, *Democracy by Force: U.S. Military Intervention in the Post–Cold War World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

9. This text may be found at http://memory.loc.gov/const/fed/fed_10.html (accessed February 26, 2003).

10. For the best description of this process, see Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 395–440; Donald Horowitz, "Making Moderation Pay," in *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies*, ed. Joseph Monteville (New York: Lexington, 1991), pp. 451–476; Richard Stubbs, "Malaysia: Avoiding Ethnic Strife in Deeply Divided Societies," in *Conflict*

and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies, ed. Joseph Monteville (New York: Lexington, 1991), p. 287.

11. For more on postconflict reconstruction, see the series of six articles in "Nation Building's Successor," *The Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (autumn 2002): 83–168; Council on Foreign Relations, "Guiding Principles for U.S. Post-Conflict Policy in Iraq," 2003 (the report of an independent working group cosponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations and the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University); Rick Barton and Bathsheba Crocker, "Winning the Peace in Iraq," *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (spring 2003): 7–22.

12. Michael Beschloss, *The Conquerors: Roosevelt, Truman and the Destruction of Hitler's Germany, 1941–1945* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), p. 175.