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## Transitions from Postcommunism

*Michael McFaul*

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## The New Iraq

# THE USES OF HISTORICAL MEMORY

Eric Davis

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When eight million Iraqis—about a third of the country's total population and almost three-fifths of its eligible voters—defied terrorist threats and voted in free parliamentary elections on 30 January 2005, friends of democracy everywhere were elated. News photographs showed smiling citizens of Iraq proudly holding up fingers covered with the long-lasting ink that polling workers had used to mark voters. A utilitarian measure designed to prevent mundane electoral chicanery had become first an occasion for terrorists' threats (ink-stained fingers, they had warned, would be cut off) and then a badge of honor and courage for Iraqis who had shown themselves willing to take a stand for their country's future.

Many observers, elated or not, registered great surprise at the degree of civic pride and activism that characterized the January elections. A deeper understanding of Iraq's past, however, suggests that such surprise was less than fully warranted. While the difficult landscape of modern Iraqi political history has often impeded the exercise of freedom and democracy, a closer inspection of this temporal topography reveals a far more favorable terrain from which the sense of a "useable" past—a historical legacy that every free and self-governing society needs—might be drawn.

We can grasp the utility of such a past by considering how it might ameliorate a problem that now hampers prospects for a democratic transition as Iraq struggles to emerge from four decades of Baath Party misrule. Like many "transitional" countries, Iraq suffers from a lack of clarity and agreement over how to define and assess the idea of democracy itself.<sup>1</sup> While most Iraqis reject the claims of ex-Baathists and radical

Islamists that democracy is a front for imperialism or a form of blasphemy, this majority still lacks a clear understanding of the term beyond a broad agreement that there must be an end to government-sponsored sectarianism and arbitrary uses of state power.

Yet democratic and civic activities are not alien to modern Iraq's history. With beginnings traceable to the early twentieth century, a prominent Iraqi nationalist movement had come into being long before the 1952 founding of the Iraqi wing of the Baath Party (which had originated in Syria and the Levant in the 1940s). Amid the frequent turbulence of Iraqi politics, this nationalist movement's record of positive democratic impulses and work toward building civil society is significant. Even after the Baathists' original seizure of power in February 1963 and the July 1968 intraparty coup that marked the triumph of a Baathist faction led by Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein, intellectuals associated with the earlier nationalist tradition joined others—including Muslim clerics as well as lay members of Islamist organizations such as the Shi'ite Daawa (Islamic Call) Party—in resisting Baathist repression. Can a revival of the historical memory, from the pre-Baathist era, of a more tolerant and politically inclusive Iraqi nationalism—a nationalism that arose to meet the challenges facing the newly created nation-state of Iraq in the early twentieth century—aid the cause of a democratic transition in the Iraq of the early twenty-first century?

Scholars and other observers of politics have not paid sufficient attention to the idea that historical memory can assist democratic transitions. By "historical memory," I mean the collective understanding that a specific group of people shares about past events which this group perceives as having shaped its current economic, cultural, social, and political status and identity.<sup>2</sup> Societies emerging from authoritarian rule commonly struggle with a lack of trust among citizens as well as a dearth of the kinds of open, active, and peaceful associative behaviors that are needed to rebuild civil society. Seeking to "divide and rule," authoritarian regimes often deliberately exploit ethnic, religious, or other communal cleavages, making them worse. Authoritarian practices such as forcing citizens to join centralized, hierarchical, state-run organizations breed habits and norms un conducive to democracy. In societies with large numbers of young people—almost two-thirds of Iraqis are under 25 years of age—the authoritarian legacy may be all that many people know. Unless these pernicious authoritarian residues are eliminated, such pillars of democracy as elections, constitutions, and representative institutions will rest on weak foundations.

### The Iraqi Nationalist Movement

The history of Iraq's nationalist movement is replete with efforts to promote political cooperation across sectarian and ethnic boundaries.

From efforts by Sunni and Shi'ite Arab notables to found a national educational system before the First World War to intercommunal opposition to the postwar British project of imposing a monarchy and constitution on Iraq, the 1920 Revolution, the 1931 general strike, the 1948 protests against the Anglo-Iraqi Portsmouth Treaty, and the 1954 elections (which saw a coalition of ideologically diverse, democratic parties win significant parliamentary representation), interethnic cooperation was the norm rather than the exception in Iraqi politics. This spirit was also evident in the *intifada* (uprising) against Saddam Hussein that erupted as the First Gulf War was ending in early 1991. Begun by Sunni Arab army officers in the southern city of Basra, the anti-Saddam *intifada* quickly spread to all ethnic groups in 16 of Iraq's 18 provinces.<sup>3</sup>

Iraq's nationalist movement also did much to foster civil society by promoting a large and diverse set of independent public associations. These associations involved notables, clerics, professionals, workers, artists, and students whose activities displayed a self-conscious pursuit of the national interest. Defying efforts at suppression, these civic-minded associations flourished until displaced by the corporatist organizations that Iraq's new republican regimes created after the toppling of the Hashemite monarchy in July 1958. The brutal repression that followed the February 1963 Baathist seizure of power administered the *coup de grâce* as thousands of Iraqi nationalists suffered arrest, torture, and execution.

The tradition of a free and lively press—more than 260 newspapers and journals have been established since Saddam fell—traces its origins to the last years of Ottoman rule, when the Young Turk Revolt of 1908 spread ideas of constitutionalism and republicanism throughout the empire's remaining Arab provinces. After the First World War, Iraqi newspapers maintained close ties to the nationalist movement, and made an art of circumventing official bans on publication by issuing new papers under different names. Their columns carried not only news but important cultural content. In a country with few printing presses, this helps to explain why the short story, which is easily serialized, became such a prominent literary form. Most important, the press revealed the strong desire of educated and politically active Iraqis to reach beyond regional and ethnic lines to a broader national audience.

In addition to promoting cross-ethnic political cooperation, civic associations, and a vibrant press, the nationalist movement also fostered literary and artistic innovation. A small pan-Arabist faction aside,<sup>4</sup> the nationalist mainstream resorted to poetry, the short story, painting, and sculpture to challenge dominant forms of authority, whether political, social, or aesthetic. Within the urban milieu of coffeehouses and writers' or artists' salons, nationalist intellectuals drew upon Iraq's rich civilizational heritage of ancient, pre-Islamic Arab, and Arab-Islamic sources to address cultural and social issues in ways that encouraged

tolerance and respect for the country's diversity. Broader participation, these thinkers understood, would pave the way for national stability and prosperity. The much smaller pan-Arabist wing of the Iraqi nationalist movement was predominantly Sunni Arab and heavily concentrated in the officer corps of the army and the tiny political elite. The pan-Arabists offered a xenophobic and chauvinist definition of political community that was bound up with rigid notions of ethnic identity and cultural boundaries.<sup>5</sup>

Against the will of Iraqi nationalists, the British used their authority under a 1920 League of Nations mandate to impose on Iraq a monarchical regime ruled by the Hashemites, a prominent family from the Hijaz region of what is today Saudi Arabia that traced its lineage to the Prophet Muhammad and were the guardians of the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The new Hashemite king, Faisal I (d. 1933), was given the throne following a rigged referendum in August 1921, after the three former Ottoman provinces of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul became the British-run State of Iraq. The British-imposed political system was beset by nepotism, corruption, sectarianism, unstable cabinets, and increasingly serious socioeconomic problems. Kurds and Shi'ites were excluded, a narrow Sunni Arab military and political elite dominated, and turmoil or even outright violence further added to political instability.

The "useable democratic past" that might help to unite and inspire Iraq's citizenry by emphasizing broad political participation and respect for cultural diversity is to be sought not in recollections of the venality that characterized most of Iraq's twentieth-century rulers, but rather in the record of nationalist resistance to their misdeeds. From the Hashemite monarchy's creation in 1921 until its fall 37 years later, nationalists rejected the corrupt and sectarian policies of the "merchants of politics" and expressed—constantly and almost always peacefully—a persistent sense of popular longing for honest government, broader political participation, and more equal access to power.

As long as one avoids romanticizing Iraq's modern history by denying its negative dimensions, there is no reason not to emphasize the positive accomplishments through which the pre-Baathist nationalist movement worked toward promoting social and political cooperation within a framework of mutual respect among Iraq's diverse ethnic groups. Although political elites, with the exception of General Abdel Karim Qasim (1958–63), did not rule in the public interest, at the level of civil society the Iraqi nationalist movement promoted values that supported cooperation for the sake of the common good.

### The Legacy of Authoritarian Rule

The Baathist regime of Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein that seized power in July 1968 favored Sunni Arabs, particularly those

of rural tribal origins, in all forms of state employment, especially the military and security forces. Shi'ites and Kurds, by contrast, became targets of official efforts to undermine their communal identities.<sup>6</sup> The Shi'ites, for whom the public celebration of certain holy days is central to their faith, saw these religious observances banned. The Kurds, who speak a non-Arabic language akin to Persian, found their cultural autonomy denied. Anyone not a Sunni Arab who managed to obtain state employment was not only expected to conform to the Baathist line, but was unable to benefit from the clientelism and favoritism that privileged the regime's Sunni Arab power base.

Sunni Arabs from the now well-known triangle north and west of Baghdad had begun to suffer economic decline even during Ottoman times, and have long prized state employment as a shield against economic want. These Sunnis, especially those in the triangle's river towns, see their long era of economic and political privilege ending and know all too well that Iraq's vast oil wealth is located mostly in the Shi'ite south and the Kurdish north. Baathism's fall, the Sunni Arabs fear, will mean for them not only political but also economic marginalization.

Reconstituting the civil society that existed prior to 1963 presents a major challenge. It has been more than four decades since Iraqis have had the freedom to found civic associations independent of the state. During that time, the state created many organizations designed to indoctrinate and control the populace—a fact that has undermined feelings of trust and the moral context of associational life in ways that work against voluntary participation, openness, and other mainstays of a democracy-friendly civil society.

Here is an area where conscious efforts to reclaim the historical memory of the Iraqi nationalist movement may help. Young Iraqis need to know that before the rise of Baathist tyranny, their country had compiled a record of spawning inclusive, antisectionarian nationalist groups. Iraqis can be proud of this record and can look to it for inspiration as they work on behalf of democratization. Iraqi scholars and the media, including Web-based outlets, can build awareness of pre-Baathist civil society. This awareness can play a crucial role in refuting fallacious claims that Iraq lacks democratic traditions, that its main ethnic groups are unable to work together, and that civil society and democracy are intrinsically alien concepts in a predominantly Arab Muslim society.

## Islam and Democracy

What can the recovered traditions of an inclusive nationalism and a free civil society tell us about the complex relationship between Islam and politics in post-Baathist Iraq? The beginning of wisdom is to stress that in Iraq, as in all Muslim societies, there is no single, unified Islamic political discourse. Unlike Egypt's experience with the Muslim Broth-

erhood (founded in Cairo in 1928) and its more radical offshoots, Iraq has no tradition of a strong Islamist movement. Shi'ite clerics were politically active in mobilizing resistance to the British invasion of 1914, but this activism was always national and civic in tone rather than sectarian and specifically religious. During the First World War, Shi'ite clerics spoke via the customary means of the *fatwa* or religious edict. Reflecting the extent to which Iraqis already thought in national terms, however, the clerics urged their fellow countrymen to defend the territory and sovereignty of Iraq understood as a nation-state with definite geographic borders, not as an abstractly defined Islamic religious community or uniquely Shi'ite entity. Whether from 1914 to 1918 or during the 1991 uprising against Saddam, Iraq's Shi'ite clerics have always viewed themselves as defending all of the country's ethnic groups.

This ecumenical spirit was also evident in the seminal event of modern Iraqi history, the Revolution of June to October 1920. This rebellion against British rule failed, but not before witnessing remarkable displays of Sunni-Shi'ite unity. Clerics from both groups urged their followers to pray in each other's mosques and to take part in each other's religious festivals. Sunni and Shi'ite Arabs vied to compose the best nationalist poetry and encouraged Jews (then Baghdad's largest minority group) and Christians to join nationalist demonstrations as full and equal citizens. Sunni and Shi'ite poets alike traveled the countryside, promoting the revolt among tribesmen and villagers and creating the beginnings of a truly national political discourse.<sup>7</sup> Shi'ite clerics in particular paid a heavy price for their nationalist stand as the British jailed or expelled numerous Shi'ite religious leaders after the revolt was suppressed. By the mid-1920s, the clerics' political role had all but vanished.<sup>8</sup>

After U.S. and coalition forces toppled Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime in March and April 2003, they discovered that one of Iraq's most important political actors was its leading Shi'ite cleric, the Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani, from the Shi'ite holy city of Najaf in southern Iraq. As head of the Hawza, a loose coalition of Shi'ite schools in and around Najaf, Sistani became a major force for promoting democratization and a formidable counterweight to Muslim radicals who charge that democracy is "un-Islamic." He pushed for early national elections that gave all Iraqis equal access to the ballot box, arguing against the narrow caucus system for approving candidates designed by Coalition Provisional Authority head L. Paul Bremer. Sistani issued religious edicts precluding Shi'ite clerics from running for office or directly taking part in the writing of Iraq's constitution.<sup>9</sup> While Sistani and his Hawza colleagues expect Islam to be honored and Iraq's Muslim clerics to be consulted regarding key laws and policies, they uphold a Quietist tradition that rejects the doctrine, originated by the Shi'ite clerical regime in Iran, of rule by a supreme Islamic legal authority (*velayat-e-faqih*).

In mid-2004, the young Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and his so-

called Mahdi Army drew much attention as radical rivals to the older and far more restrained Sistani and his Hawza colleagues. Sadr's forces, however, suffered grave setbacks during August 2004 fighting against U.S. and Iraqi troops in and around Najaf. Sistani subsequently clamped down on his rival, who leans heavily on the legitimacy and popularity of his late father, Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, whom the Baathists murdered in 1999. Muqtada al-Sadr's youth, his largely violent message, and the ill-defined ideology and goals of his movement suggest that he is not a strong candidate to lead Iraq's Shi'ite majority—a finding reinforced by his movement's failure to gain significant influence in Iraq's new parliament in the January 2005 elections.

The relationship between religion and politics in Iraq's Sunni Arab community is also complex.<sup>10</sup> Like their Shi'ite counterparts, Sunni clerics are unable to claim a sustained tradition of opposition to the state. While groups formed since Saddam's fall have been highly critical of the U.S. occupation, the most prominent, the Association of Muslim Scholars, has condemned suicide bombings, at least when they harm Iraqi civilian bystanders.<sup>11</sup> Some of the Association's members have even died at the hands of assassins, most likely violent Islamists who despised their targets for being insufficiently radical. Since 2003, some Sunni and Shi'ite clerics have harked back to the ecumenical tradition of the 1920 Revolution by meeting to denounce the efforts of radical Islamists and ex-Baathists to reimpose sectarianism on Iraq.<sup>12</sup> In these significant ways, the history of modern Iraq offers no support for the politics of religious radicalism, but instead underlines the prospect that Iraq's two major Muslim communities can find common ground for cooperation and even mutual acceptance in the pursuit of national goals. Recent meetings by members of the Hawza and the Association of Muslim Scholars to try and form a common policy on the role of Islam in Iraqi society underscore this spirit of cooperation.

### The Kurds and the Issue of Federalism

Similarly difficult is the delicate question of federalism, which centers on relations between Iraq's Arab and Kurdish populations. Unless the recently elected National Assembly incorporates the principle of federalism in the new constitution, the Kurds will refuse anything beyond nominal involvement in the new Iraqi polity. Given the history of attacks on Kurds by the central government in Baghdad—including, most notoriously, Saddam's use of poison gas against the town of Halabja in 1988 and his ethnic-cleansing campaign (known as the ANFAL) that destroyed more than 1,200 Kurdish villages—as well as the autonomy that the Kurdish north has enjoyed since the creation of the U.S.- and British-protected northern "no-fly zone" in 1991, it is easy to understand why Kurds insist on federalism.

Seen from this perspective, the local nonbinding referendum that accompanied the 30 January 2005 National Assembly elections in the Kurdish regions was less an expression of divisive intent than a pragmatic effort to confront a complex historical problem. Kurds voted overwhelmingly for autonomy, which they understand as something quite distinct from secession. When I visited the region and spoke at length with Iraqi Kurds in March 2005, they were adamant about federalism but rejected the idea of independence from Iraq. They all understood that a small Kurdish rump state would not only be landlocked, but would find itself surrounded by hostile neighbors, including Iran, Syria, Arab Iraq, and especially Turkey, and cut off from badly needed flows of Gulf Arab investment capital.

While Kurds are not hostile toward Iraqi Arabs, many Kurds are unaware of the extent to which Arabs and Kurds have worked together in numerous social and political contexts in the past. Kurds served prominently in the Iraqi army and government, rising as high as the rank of prime minister in 1958, just before the monarchy's fall. As labor unions began to form during the late 1920s and 1930s, Kurdish oil and state-railway workers campaigned shoulder-to-shoulder with their Arab fellow workers for wage hikes and better working conditions. The cohesion of Arabs, Kurds, and workers from other ethnic groups—most of whom could neither read nor write—in the face of repression and inducements was remarkable. When the authorities arrested strike leaders and then offered rank-and-file workers higher pay and benefits to return to work, almost all refused and demanded the release of their leaders first.<sup>13</sup>

The prevalent assumptions about democratic transitions since the fall of Soviet communism create complications for understanding the development of democracy in Iraq. In reaction to the heavy hand of Soviet and East-bloc authoritarianism, postcommunist understandings of democracy have stressed individual rights, building the institutions of civil society, transparency in governance, market mechanisms for bringing about economic growth, and a limited role for the state in social and economic affairs.

While all these elements are critical to establishing a democratic society, a conception of the state built purely on the classical-liberal "night watchman" or limited-state model will almost certainly fail to move Iraq toward a fuller and more stable democracy. Given the legacy of Baathist neglect of society, and the economic degradation caused by the UN sanctions of the 1990s, Iraq would be better served by a state that shoulders broad responsibility for promoting social welfare, investing in infrastructure, and expanding education, thereby increasing the country's social capital. In the important area of promoting national reconciliation, the new Iraqi state can benefit from the experiences of countries such as Argentina, Chile, and South Africa. To recover from the horrors of the Baathist dictatorship, Iraq may need not only revised

secondary-school and university curricula as well as special educational projects, but also a national truth-and-reconciliation commission.

In addressing the issue of social welfare, the historical memory of the Iraqi nationalist movement is also instructive. The core of the Iraqi nationalist movement, which included groups such as the People's Organization, the Iraqi Communist Party, and the National Democratic Party, always called upon the state to address the "social question" by working to ensure that all Iraqis could maintain a decent standard of living amid conditions free of sectarian favoritism. Iraqi tradition, in other words, supports a polity similar to a West European-style "social democracy." To be successful, Iraqi democracy will need to promote sustained employment for the middle and lower classes, land reform for the peasantry, labor laws for workers, and better public education for all segments of society.

### Prospects for the Future

Even after the successful January 2005 elections, many analysts continue to rate democracy's prospects in Iraq as poor due to three main problems. The first is Iraq's political fragmentation and the lack of trust among its constituent ethnic groups. The second is the challenge to secularism resulting from a more intense Islamic awareness since the 1991 Gulf War. The "turn to religion" during the 1990s by large segments of Iraqi society—a reaction not just to the economic problems caused by UN sanctions but also to the moral decay spread by Saddam, his sons, and other members of a state that came to resemble an organized-crime syndicate—has sown divisions over the definition of the political community and hence the construction of post-Baathist political institutions. The third difficulty is continuing socioeconomic stagnation, which includes an unemployment rate above 60 percent and a vast youth cohort ill served by a poor educational system and a lack of career opportunities. If the new government—which took more than three months to cobble together in the wake of January's vote—fails to make visible headway against these problems, many young Iraqis may become attracted to radical ideologies.

In surveys taken since Saddam's fall, Iraqis consistently say that their three main concerns are personal security, a decent standard of living, and democratic governance, in that order. In other words, democracy cannot flourish without a significant improvement in the ordinary Iraqi citizen's standard of living.

While the new Iraq government clearly faces a difficult road ahead, there are a number of considerations that give grounds for hope. First, all indications are that Iraqis resoundingly reject authoritarianism. However grim the last two years may have been, Saddam Hussein has never received an approval rating of more than a few percentage points in any

poll. The 1991 Gulf War unleashed a tide of opposition literature by expatriates, including intellectuals, dissident political leaders, military officers, and former Baath Party members. These writings dwelt on the enormous gap between the lofty promises and the tawdry realities of Baathist ideology and political practices. Authors detailed, for example, how Saddam's regime promoted pan-Arabism while abusing first the ethnic Arabs of Iran's oil-rich Khuzestan province (occupied by Saddam during part of the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s) and then the Arab citizens of Kuwait during Saddam's conquest and ransacking of that country from August 1990 to February 1991. Many Iraqis who had believed Baathist rhetoric became disillusioned and developed new ways of thinking about politics.<sup>14</sup>

Second, Iraqis have expressed strong support for creating a new constitution that includes explicit mechanisms to prevent the arbitrary exercise of state power. Aside from the small elite that benefited from Baathist rule, the vast majority of Iraqis lived in constant fear of arrest, torture, and even execution for small or even imaginary infractions. While Iraqis are still, in often tentative ways, exploring democracy as a political model, they know all too well the concrete horrors of a past they want never to see repeated, and care deeply about creating institutions that will prevent a return to authoritarian rule.

Third, despite the turn to Islam by much of society, the most powerful religious institution in Iraq, the Hawza, rejects the idea of an Islamic state ruled by a supreme clerical expert, and has even enjoined Shi'ite clerics from holding public office. Saddam constantly attacked the Hawza—assassinating many clerics whom he considered threats to his regime—but could never destroy it, thereby bestowing on it special prestige in the wake of his fall. No Iraqi has been more prominent than Grand Ayatollah Sistani in calling for democratic elections that include all of Iraq's ethnic groups and political organizations. While the January 2005 National Assembly elections have shown that secularists still command great political influence and will be needed to form the current and future governments, Sistani and the Hawza do not object to this state of affairs. As professional associations, women's organizations, labor unions, artistic or youth groups, and other civil society organizations reconstitute themselves, secularists will acquire greater political influence. With rising confidence resulting from the effective exercise of political power, Shi'ites will no longer feel such a strong need for the clergy to assume a leading political role. As the clergy's role in politics declines, so will its political influence.

Among Saddam Hussein's most grandiose ideological enterprises was his ambitious "Project for the Rewriting of History." Ostensibly initiated to reclaim Iraq's history from domination by Western colonialism, the Project in fact sought to erase from Iraqi historical memory all the positive accomplishments of the pre-1963 nationalist movement. Iraq's

democratic activists might turn Saddam's project on its head by crafting something like a "Project for the Reviving of Iraqi Historical Memory." Such an effort (it need not be formally institutionalized) would bring together the freely conducted research of Iraqi scholars and intellectuals

to document the positive contributions that pre-Baathist Iraqi nationalism made to cultural pluralism, intercommunal tolerance, the battle for social justice, and the struggle for broader political participation. Studies of the dynamics of cross-ethnic political participation in pre-1963 Iraq will help to expose sectarianism as a political construct rather than an inherent quality of some pre-existing Iraqi "national character."

The crucial campaign that the country's democratic activists and new government will have to press will be for the hearts and minds of Iraqi youth. Here the key points that need emphasizing are, first, that democracy is consistent with Islam, and, second, that tolerance rather than mutual suspicion and ideological rigidity is the truest and best of Iraq's political traditions. The higher educational system will be pivotal in promoting a democratic political culture. Given its deterioration under the Baath Party, the damage done by looters in April 2003, and insurgents' intimidation and even murder of university professors, the government needs to make educational reform and recovery a high priority.

Baghdad University alone has tens of thousands of students. Through its corridors walk the next generation of Iraq's leaders. The time to reach them and those like them in other universities and cities is not tomorrow, but today. The United States, Arab and other donor nations, and the United Nations should offer funds and skilled people to help provide Iraqi youth with a better understanding of the past. This includes an improved grasp not merely of the pre-1963 nationalist movement, but of the history of resistance to the Baathist regime's sectarian and divisive policies.<sup>15</sup> Documenting such resistance can help offset the perceptions of some Iraqis, and the feelings of shame that accompany them, that there was no opposition to Saddam and the Baath, thereby contributing to the process of national healing.

Iraq's large younger generation has known only Baathist repression and UN sanctions. Studies show that these young people, like their counterparts in the West and elsewhere, are more likely to seek information and diversion from television and the Internet than from books or other print media. Only recently has the idea of developing conflict-resolution centers, peace-studies curricula, distance learning, and service learning been actively considered by educators most immediately con-

cerned with promoting civic consciousness among Iraq's young people, and especially its college students.<sup>16</sup> Using television and the Internet to spread information about democracy, including its successes in Muslim societies such as Afghanistan, Indonesia, Palestine, Qatar, and Turkey, may act as a powerful counter to the insurgents' claim that a Taliban-style theocracy is Iraq's destiny.

The Internet holds great promise for educating Iraqi youth.<sup>17</sup> Many Iraqi newspapers publish their daily and weekly editions online. Since April 2003, many Web sites promoting political openness and cultural tolerance have been established. Using the Internet, and assuming Iraq's secondary schools acquire more computers, university faculty can take a leading role in developing curricula for use by school teachers who seek to help their students explore the relationship between cultural and religious tolerance on the one hand, and democratic governance on the other. Iraqi professors will need to be not only scholars (important as that is), but also supporters of outreach who aspire to foster a stronger appreciation for the norms and principles on which democracy depends. Their universities can best accomplish this through establishing regular and ongoing relationships with the elementary and secondary-school system.

Since 2003, talk radio has become popular throughout Iraq and airs opinions from all parts of the ideological spectrum. Qasim Mustafa's "The People's Problems" on Radio Baghdad is an especially popular call-in show, but similar programs on Radio Dijla, Radio Sumer, Radio Diyala, Radio al-Hurra, Future Radio, and Religious Nation Radio also attract many listeners. Iraqi historians who are well versed in the Iraqi nationalist movement's accomplishments should seek invitations to appear on these programs, where they can express their views and converse directly over the airwaves with a cross-section of Iraqis holding a variety of political opinions.

General Abdel Karim Qasim, who took power in 1958 and ruled until the Baathists overthrew and killed him in 1963, used television very effectively to battle sectarian and ethnic divisiveness. Iraqis responded especially well to folkloric programs that recalled their rural roots and emphasized the cultural commonalities shared by all Iraq's ethnic groups. Saddam copied this approach, but slipped in ideological subtleties that opposed the socially inclusive intentions of the Qasim regime. Folklore remains a genre that strongly appeals to many Iraqis, who even in Iraq's large cities are often only a generation removed from rural life. Beaten by Saddam from a plowshare into a sword, folklore, in the hands of democratic forces, can once again become a means of promoting a common cultural and political identity that all Iraqis share as equal stakeholders in a free and participatory polity.

The new Iraqi government should consider using the mass media to hold national "town hall" meetings to discuss the problems facing Iraqi society. In Yemen, a senior Islamic judge challenged adherents of al-

Qaeda to a series of debates over the question of whether or not Islam sanctions the kind of violence practiced by that organization. To date, he has won the exchanges, converting many young Yemenis to his point of view.<sup>18</sup> If the new Iraqi government is able to recruit skilled educators who, armed with relevant texts and persuasive arguments, gain national attention, the airing of views on both the past and future of Iraqi politics might have a similarly potent effect on Iraqi youth.

In a recent UNESCO poll of almost 10,500 Iraqi families commissioned by Iraq's Ministry of Planning and Cooperative Development, 85 percent of respondents aged 19 to 24 said that they rejected violence as a means of solving political problems. As encouraging as that result is, only 56 percent of these young people indicated an interest in "cultural matters." Clearly there is a need to raise young citizens' levels of concern with and understanding of Iraq's modern history and culture.<sup>19</sup>

Omitted by this survey, as the newspaper *al-Hayat* noted, was the pressing question of meaningful employment and the hope for a materially promising future. While no one wants a return to the economic statism of the republican regimes that ruled Iraq from 1958 to 2003, those who make public policy should note the clear relationship between market forces, economic growth, and Iraq's reconstruction as a democratic society.

The idea of turning Basra into a "megaport," for instance, goes back to 1973, when Saddam first proposed the idea to Kuwait. Fearing that the Baathist regime would use the project to infringe on its sovereignty (Baathist ideology has always claimed that Iraq, Kuwait and all other Arab states are really only regions of a single pan-Arab nation), Kuwait rejected it. But now, with a new democratic government in place, extensive economic cooperation and even a shared physical-infrastructure network—rail lines and highways linking Iraq with Iran and Kuwait—have become possible. Such a renewed and expanded port would endow Iraq with the largest import-export hub in the eastern half of the Arab world, give productive jobs to thousands (including many Shi'ite southerners whose needs Saddam ignored), and give Iraq's economic development and reconstruction efforts a huge boost. In projects such as this, the links between democracy, peace, and prosperity are clear.

Given the trauma that Iraq suffered under Baathist rule, however, democratization cannot be solely the product of society and the market. As the South African case (among others) demonstrates, the process of uncovering the truth about what took place under authoritarian rule and laying a basis for reconciliation in light of that knowledge will be one of the new government's most delicate, yet urgent tasks. Here too, intergroup trust and understanding can benefit from a careful review of the record of resistance (covert or otherwise) to Baathist rule by members of all sects and ethnic groups. Demonstrating that neither the suffering that Baathism caused, nor the resistance that it generated, is

the province of a single group may help all groups see that they hold a common stake in building the new Iraq.

Iraq's experience since the day in April 2003 when U.S. Marines and jubilant citizens pulled down Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad's Firdos Square suggests that democracy can progress along various roads, often experiencing unexpected developments along the way. Few would have predicted that Iraqis would demonstrate so much capacity to move toward democracy so soon after the overthrow of a brutal dictatorship that ruled for almost 35 years. The nearly 60 percent turnout by voters last January, despite great threats to their physical safety, is but one sign of how deeply committed Iraq's people are to securing a democratic transition for their country.

Continued study of the process of democratization in Iraq is important not merely in its own right, but also because of the lessons—practical and theoretical—that it may offer concerning the conditions under which democracy thrives and prospers. Iraq reminds us, in often dramatic ways, how important it is to intelligently synthesize the universal norms and principles of democratic theory with the unique experiences and practices of countries that yearn for freedom after years of suffering under official intolerance, political exclusivity, and dictatorship. Iraq is not the first country to find itself in such a situation, nor in all likelihood will it be the last. What the past might say about Iraq's future therefore matters, for Iraqis and for many others besides.

## NOTES

1. A recent Iraqi Prospect Organization poll of eight hundred university students in Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul typifies this problem. Support for democracy was overwhelming, but the students seemed at a loss as to how democracy might be achieved. See, "Iraqi Youth Desire Democracy, but Do Not Know How to Achieve It," *al-Hayat* (London), 22 March 2005.
2. Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 4.
3. Eric Davis, *Memories of State*, 29–108; for more on Iraqi nationalist activism and peaceful civic protest under the Hashemite monarchy, see Adeeel Dawisha, "Democratic Attitudes and Practices in Iraq," *Middle East Journal* 59 (Winter 2005): 11–30.
4. Disproportionately Sunni Arab, pan-Arab nationalists dominated the army's officer corps, the police forces, and the security services. One of the most prominent, Colonel Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh, led the pro-Axis May 1941 uprising against British forces in Iraq. His memoirs, *The Knights of Arabism in Iraq* (in Arabic), were published in Damascus in 1956.
5. For examples of pan-Arabist thinking, see al-Sabbagh's memoirs and also the reminiscences of King Faisal I's director-general of education, Khalidun Satic al-Husari, *My Memoirs in Iraq, 1920–1941* (in Arabic, 2 vols., Beirut: Dar al-Talca, 1967).

6. For example, the Baath Party leader in the Shi'ite shrine city of Karbala told me in May 1980 that the city's youth were sent to summer camps in the Kurdish north. His account of camp activities made it clear that their goal was to strip campers of their sense of Shi'ite identity.
7. Sami Zubaïda, "The Fragments Imagine the Nation: The Case of Iraq," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34 (May 2002): 207, 211.
8. For a discussion of the activity of Shi'ite clerics at this early stage of modern Iraq's political development, see Abd al-Halim al-Rahimi, *The History of the Islamic Movement in Iraq, 1900-1924* (Beirut: al-Dar al-Alamiya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzi, 1985) (Arabic).
9. Falih Abd al-Jabbar, "Iraq: A Religious or Secular State?" *al-Hayat* (London), 20 February 2005.
10. For a discussion of the Sunni Arab insurgency, see Eric Davis, "Iraq's Sunni Clergy Enter the Fray," *Religion in the News*, Winter 2005, 9-11, 24.
11. "An Association of Muslim Scholars' Spokesperson: Suicide Bombers Will Suffer the Fate of Going to Hell Because Their Resistance Is Directed Against the Iraqi People and Not the Occupation," *al-Ahali* (Baghdad), 6 October 2004.
12. As an example, see "Political, Religious Parties Seek to Create an Alliance," *al-Nahda* (Baghdad), 22 March 2004, which reported that the Association of Muslim Scholars held meetings with Ayatollah Sistani and other Hawza members.
13. For a discussion of the Iraqi working class, see Eric Davis, "History for the Many or History for the Few? The Historiography of the Iraqi Working Class," in Zachary Lockman, ed., *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 274-301.
14. See, for example, the memoirs of the 1991 anti-Saddam uprising written by a former Republican Guard major-general, Najib al-Salibi, *The Earthquake: What Happened in Iraq After the Withdrawal of Forces From Kuwait?* (London: al-Rafid, 1998), esp. 28-32 (in Arabic). For other Iraqi expatriate writings in response to the Baathist regime's suppression of the uprising, and their efforts to highlight a more politically and culturally tolerant past, see Davis, *Memoires of State*, esp. notes 98-99, 113, 115, 117, and 119-21 on pp. 347-49.
15. For a discussion of the resistance by intellectuals to Baathist rule, see Eric Davis, *Memoires of State*, especially ch. 8, "Memories of State and the Arts of Resistance," 200-26.
16. These were among the themes of a recent conference, "The Civic Mission of the Iraqi University," that the U.S. Institute of Peace sponsored in Dukan, Iraq, 13-14 March 2005, and which the author attended.
17. "Internet Cafes Spread Widely in Iraq," *BBC Arabic News*, 7 July 2003.
18. "Kotanic Duel Eases Terror," *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 February 2005.
19. "85 percent of Iraqi Youth are Against Violence, While News and Music Represent Their Most Prominent Interests," *al-Hayat*, 22 February 2005.