The New Iraq
Adeed Dawisha  ■  Eric Davis  ■  Ahmed H. al-Rahim

International Linkage and Democratization
Steven Levitsky  &  Lucan A. Way

A Fresh Look at Semipresidentialism
Cindy Skach  &  Timothy Colton  ■  Robert Elgie

Sultan Tepe on Turkey’s AK Party
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Wendy Hunter & Timothy Power on Lula’s Brazil
John McMillan on corruption in Angola
Vitali Silitski on Natan Sharansky

Transitions from Postcommunism
Michael McFaul
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The years since 2000 have seen a surprising new wave of democratic breakthroughs in postcommunist lands, as varied as Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine. Can we identify any factors common to each case?

International Linkage and Democratization
Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way
The role of international factors varied greatly across the post-Cold War transitions to democracy, but the intensity and results of external democratizing pressure depended on two variables: linkage to the West and Western leverage.

The New Iraq
1. Democratic Institutions and Performance
Aref Dawisha
Elections and their consequences are the primary measures for democratization in Iraq, and thus for evaluating the future of Iraq.

II. The Sistani Factor
Ahmed H. al-Rasuli
For the Shi'a majority and its senior religious leader, the January elections played out against the background of a longing for justice that has deep spiritual sources as well as more recent secular-political roots.

III. The Uses of Historical Memory
Eric Davis
If Iraq is to become the free and self-governing country that an overwhelming majority of its citizens want it to be, a "measurable part" made possible by historical memory will be vital.

Turkey’s AKP: A Model “Muslim-Democratic” Party?
Suhet Topcu
Is the Islamic-oriented party that has ruled since 2002 really the harbinger of "Muslim democracy," or is it something more familiar in Turkish politics: a hierarchical group whose too closely in touch with society and overly focused on one man?"
The New Iraq

Historical Memory

Eric Davis

When multimillionaire Zaid Abu Radiation (also known as Abu Radiation) was assassinated in 2004 by the U.S. military, it was a defining moment for the new Iraqi nation. Abu Radiation had been a prominent politician and a vocal critic of the U.S. occupation. His assassination was seen as a blow to the country's democracy and its struggle for freedom.

The Iraqi Nationalist Movement

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

The image contains text that discusses historical events and figures related to the political landscape of Iraq, including the Iraqi nationalist movement and the political dynamics following the 2004 assassination of Zaid Abu Radiation. The text references the historical memory and the challenges faced by Iraq as it navigates its path towards democracy and national unity.
The Legacy of Authoritarian Rule

The British empire, under Ahmad Shah Abdali and Daud Khan, was the first to assert power in the 18th century. The legacy of authoritarian rule continues to shape the political landscape of the region today.
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. 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 youth.

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 agriculture 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 population—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 Ba’athist tyranny, their country had compiled a record of spanning inclusive, anticolonialist nationalistic groups. Iraqis can be proud of this record and can look to it for inspiration as they work on behalf of democratization. Including Web-based outlets, can build awareness of pre-Baathist civil society. This awareness can play a crucial role in refuting facile 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 Brotherhood (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 and (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. Shi’ite clerics in particular paid a heavy price for their nationalist stance as the British failed or expelled numerous Shi’ite religious leaders after the revolt was suppressed. By the mid-1920s, the clerics’ political role had all but vanished.

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 Sayid Ali al-Sistani, from the Shi’ite holy city of Najaf in south-central Iraq. As head of the Hawza, a loose coalition of Shi’ite schools and the media, including Web-based outlets, can build awareness of pre-Baathist civil society. This awareness can play a crucial role in refuting facile 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.

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called Mahdi Army drew much attention as radical rivals to the older and far more restrained Sistani and his Hzawa 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 lavished heavily on the legitimacy and popularity of his late father, Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, whom the Baathists murdered in 1999. Moutada 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 majorit’y—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. 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. 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 barked back in the ecumenical tradition of the 1920 Border Conference by meeting to denounce the efforts of radical Islamists and ex-Baathists to repurpose sectarianism on Iraq. 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 Hzawa 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 formal involvement in Iraq’s new politics. 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 the ethnic-cleaning campaign (known as the ANFAL) that destroyed more than 1.2 million Kurdish villages—also 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. 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
Prospects for the Future

Even after the successful January 2005 elections, many analysts considered the first post-Saddam government to be a fragile coalition dominated by the Shiites and that the political process would be slow and contentious. The second is the challenge posed by the economic problems. Even after the successful January 2005 elections, the government faced significant challenges in providing basic services and infrastructure. Despite the progress made since the fall of Saddam Hussein, many Iraqis continue to live in poverty and unemployment remains high. The country also faces significant challenges in security and stability, with ongoing violence and sectarian conflict. The success of the government in addressing these issues will be key to the future of Iraq. While there are still many challenges to overcome, the prospects for the future of Iraq are bright as the country continues to rebuild and move forward.
The crucial campaign
democracy initiatives
demand the support of
Iran’s youth.
NOTES

1. A recent Iraq Project Organization poll of some hundred university students in Baghdad, Basra, and Najaf, the rumour-mongers highest in the east, revealed that 80 percent of those who had heard the stories of democracy in Iraq repeatedly vowed they would never vote for it. These figures are nearly identical to those in the United States in recent elections.


5. For example, in the planning of King Faisal's new capital, a significant portion of the executive and administrative roles were filled by foreigners, including those from the United States. This was done to ensure the new capital was a showcase of Western architecture and technology.

6. As the South Korean government continued to enforce policies aimed at reducing the influence of foreign influence on the country, it became clear that the resistance to these changes was significant and widespread.

7. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) is an intergovernmental organization that promotes the development of international trade and investment policies.

8. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) is an international organization founded in 1947 and now under the umbrella of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

9. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is an international organization that promotes international cooperation in the maintenance of international monetary order and the promotion of international trade and development.

10. The World Bank is an international organization that provides financial and technical assistance to developing countries for the purpose of promoting economic development and welfare.

11. The Commission for the Study of Political Rights and Responsibilities defined the right to vote as "freedom after years of suffering under official intransigence, political exclusion, and dictatorship. Iraq is very different from other Arab countries in this respect."
6. For example, the Baath Party leader in the Shi'a dominated city of Kirkuk told me in May 1990 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’i identity.


11. “An Association of Muslim Scholars’ Spokesperson Suicide Brothers Will Suffer the Fate of Going to Hell Because Their Resistance Is Directly Against the Iraqi People and Not the Occupation,” al-Shbah (Baghdad), 6 October 2004.

12. As an example, see “Political, Religious Parties Seek to Create an Alliance,” al-Ahram (Baghdad), 27 March 2004, which reported that the association of Muslim Scholars held meetings with Ayyad Allah Sani and other Huna members.


14. See, for example, the memoirs of the 1991 anti-Saddam uprising written by a former Republican Guard major general, Najla al-Salih, The Earthquake: What Happened in Iraq After the Withdrawal of Forces From Kuwait” (London: al-Kuds, 1998), esp. 38, 45-125, for a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the Israeli occupation on the Baathist regime’s suppression of the uprising, and their efforts to highlight a more negatively and critically toned post-war history, Ministry of State, esp. notes 95-99, 114, 115, 117, and 119-121 on pp. 347-49.

15. For a discussion of the resistance by intellectuals to Baath rule, see Eric Davis, Movements of State, especially ch. 6, “Memories of State and the Arts of Resistance,” 200-256.

16. These were among the themes of a recent conference, “The U.S. Mission to the Iraqi University,” that the U.S. Institute of Peace sponsored in Tokyo, Iraq, 13-14 March 2005, and which the author attended.

