

***Prospects for Democracy in Iraq***

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We should not underestimate the potential for democracy in Iraq, but nor should we overestimate the ease with which it will establish itself in the wake of decades of totalitarian rule...

A good starting point is the unity of the Iraqi opposition [to Saddam Hussein] on the goal of democracy. Much has been reported about how diverse, if not fractious, the opposition is. It includes Sunnis, Shia's, Kurds and Christians; Islamists, Secular Democrats and Communists. But what is most remarkable about this diverse umbrella is its unity of vocabulary: Every faction of the opposition speaks the language of democracy. There is a broad consensus that a post-Saddam Iraq should be representative, decentralized and federal, with civilian control of the military and respect for individual rights and ethnic diversity. There are still debates about the precise structure of this federal system, but what is key is the agreement that power in a future Iraq should be devolved. This is a radical idea in the Middle East.

One of the detrimental effects of Saddam's reign is the Iraqi people's loss of faith in their ability to influence their environment and effect change. Iraqis barely have control over the details of their daily lives; the idea that they can be involved in shaping their collective destiny is inconceivable under Saddam Hussein. We will need to target Iraqi individuals and teach them to organize and advocate for their interests in their local communities and at the national level.

*For a full text go to*

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