Political Culture and Democratization in Iraq

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1 Political Culture and Change of Regime

More than a year after the last Gulf War, in March 2003, the situation in Iraq is far from stable and there is no telling how the future of the country will develop. However questionnable the reasons of the allied forces were for going to war, there is now unanimity that the resultant overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime constitutes a positive outcome. The overwhelming majority of the world community, together with the Iraqi people, welcome the end to decades of dictatorship. At the same time, the Iraqis deplore the war, which brought this about: as a result of the heavy bombing and destruction they now regard the USA with scepticism and disapproval.

The allied troops in Iraq see themselves as a stabilizing force, guaranteeing peace and freedom, whereas the Iraqis consider them to be unwelcome occupiers. The anti-American feeling is growing by analogy with the duration of the occupation, aggravated still further by the lack of substantial evidence supporting the necessity for a pre-emptive attack on Iraq. Since US President George W. Bush officially declared the war over, on 1 May 2003, the prevailing Iraqi attitude can best be characterized with the following sentence: "Against war, against Saddam. Against America, against Bush."

The stated objective of the Bush administration - to transform Iraq into a radiant example of Arabian democracy in the Near East – would appear to be a long way off, in view of the continual violence against the allied forces and installations in Iraq. The allies have had to realize that a change in government is only the first step towards dismantling the old powers that be. Waging war and toppling the dictator were definitely the easier tasks in Iraq. Discussions about post-war order and its implementation and the development of democratic structures began much too late and this second task currently presents by far the greatest challenge. The American attempt to control the destiny of Iraq according to its own ideals and with a military administration, more or less totally excluding the Iraqis, proved impracticable.

Consequently, so far only one thing is certain about the future of Iraq, namely that it should have a democratic political system in future. The big question is, what steps are necessary to enable democratic development in Iraq? On 13 July 2003 an Iraqi Governing Council was set up. In conjunction with the Coalition Provisional Authority this elaborated the "Agree-

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ment on Political Process", incorporating a step-by-step political timetable. This was presented on 15 November 2003 and aims at the gradual transformation of Iraq into an effective sovereign democracy.[1] Now that a practicable approach for the democratization of Iraq has finally been devised, the next question is whether the plans of the Governing Council are compatible with the political culture in Iraq. According to Gerhard Simon, a German political scientist, political culture concerns views and values, which are typical of a society and relevant to its political actions. It deals with the general set-up preceding and determining events and actions of the governing bodies. Apart from views, it also encompasses society's behaviour as a whole and the behaviour of its elite in its deliberations. Together these factors make up the political mentality, which has a lasting effect on political institutions, their relationship with each other and their place in society. Institutions of power can display amazing continuity despite upheavals, revolutions and passage of time.[2]

So far it would appear that various sectors of the Iraqi population are becoming entrenched in an attitude of rejection for a variety of reasons. Whether this rejection is aimed only temporarily against the occupying forces or generally against the implementation of democratic structures in Iraq remains to be seen. The essay in hand analyses whether and what prerequisites exist in Iraq to enable the establishment of a lasting effective democracy. The analysis assumes that prospects for and success of democratization in Iraq are largely dependant on the political culture of the country. Therefore the political culture will be examined, as determining factor for the democratic system to be established in Iraq, including the personnel and structural problems. In conclusion, as a result of the analysis, proposals will be formulated which could serve as possible guidelines for a democratization strategy in Iraq.

2 Democratization Prospects

2.1 Democratic Class and Liberalization Process

The Role of the Middle-Classes: according to the theory of democracy, a fully developed middle-class is one of the main pre-requisites for a stable democracy. As in western societies, the democratic class in Iraq was and is to be found primarily in the middle-class. Middle-class prosperity in Iraq, which was at times widespread, degenerated steadily from 1991 onwards, during the 12 year embargo. As a result, the influence of the democratic middle-class on development in Iraq is at present at an ebb.

Having said that, with respect to Iraq it is inappropriate to equate the middle-class per se with a social class

which is striving for democratic ideals. "Thus far, however, this group has not pushed for democratization or reform".[3] The main reason for this is to be found in the systematic persecution of dissenters by Saddam Hussein's regime. In the one-party state, where all opposition was crushed, draconian measures – even liquidation – were imposed at the merest suspicion of "subversive" activities. For decades, the only alternatives for democrats were to knuckle under or go into exile. For the rising generations under Hussein's regime, democratic opinion-forming processes and public consciousness were virtually phased out. During the repression, the Iraqi middle-class was characterized by submission and passivity. The actual fatal consequences of this development will be discussed later.

However, there is another explanation - other than the fear of reprisal - why the Iraqi middle-class toed the line: „As in many Arab countries, much of Iraq´s middle-class remains directly dependent on the state, primarily through employment in the vast bureaucracy, in state-owned industries, in military and security agencies, and in Baathist political bureaus."[4] The Iraqi administration guaranteed full employment. It constituted an inflated, clumsy state machinery which could not be defined on the achievement principle but rather on the principles of patronage, nepotism and corruption. This naturally explained its inefficiency.

In Opposition to the Opposition: The continuous repression of opposition groups between 1968 and 2003 results in the highly inhomogeneous appearance of democratic forces in Iraq today. For example, there are the democrats who discovered liberal thought processes during training and university studies abroad. On the other hand we find Iraqi intellectuals and the traditional democratic avant-garde, which existed already during the monarchy (1921-1958). A rather unusual democratic clientele is constituted by former communists, who turned their backs on the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) in 1991 after the collapse of the USSR and have since adopted democratic principles. This circle, which today provides an important contribution towards change in Iraq, even includes former party officials of the central committee of the ICP. Even former public figures, like the present chairman of the Governing Council, Adnan Al-Pachichi, are now amongst those representing a democratic Iraq. What all these people and groups have in common, is, that during Saddam Hussein's regime they rendered no opposition – or none worth mentioning. The possible reasons for this have already been discussed.

Really active opposition was formed in exile abroad, since it was unthinkable to even consider organized resistance at home, in view of the nation-wide surveillance and persecution. Resistance and uprisings against the regime occurred (as after the second Gulf War, 1991) in a spontaneous and uncoordinated

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[1] Cf. the homepage of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) (2003): "Agreement on Political Process", http://www.cpa-iraq.org/audio/20031115_Nov-15-GC-CPA-Final_Agreement-post.htm, date of access: 3 January 2004.
[2] For political culture see Almond, Gabriel/ Verba, Sidney (1963), *The Civic Culture*, Princeton.

[3] Dawisha, Adeed/ Dawisha, Karen (2003), „How to build a democratic Iraq", *Foreign Affairs*, No.3, pp.36-50, here p.47.
[4] Ibid: 48.

manner. Consequently they were unsuccessful. The Iraqi opposition in exile attempted to provide an umbrella organization for the various groups through the foundation of the Iraqi National Congress (INC), after the second Gulf War. However, this attempt failed thanks to the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of the groups. Thus the influence of the opposition in exile remained minimal. After 11 September 2001, when the Bush administration promoted the Iraqi opposition in exile to a "natural ally" in the fight against terrorism, certain of its representatives managed to assert more influence in the White House, even to the point of demanding a violent change of regime.[5]

After their return to a liberated Iraq, the exiled Iraqi dissenters were unable to gain a foothold. On the contrary, they were greeted with disapproval. They were accused of having led a life of luxury in the West, far away from all Iraqi problems and, on their return, of wanting to take over the reins of power. Nevertheless, the role of the repatriated exiled Iraqis in the democratic development of the country is extremely important, as they constitute the only political class in the country, which has experienced democratic structures and processes in practice. The strategic value of the Iraqi exiles lies first and foremost in their ability to sketch a realistic picture of democracy for their compatriots. As it is impatient to see the first signs of progress, the Iraqi population tends at present towards radical solutions. The implementation of democratic structures is often a lengthy process and the former exiles can therefore assume a mediatory role by explaining this to Iraqi society. They constitute a democratic constant, which sooner or later - with increasing social acceptance – may serve as a personnel reservoir for a democratic Iraq.

2.2 System Viability and Ethnocentricity

Democratization in Iraq – Squaring of the Circle?
Inasmuch as this essay does not participate in the dispute over the legitimacy of the third Gulf War, neither does it pretend to contribute to the similarly normative discussion as to whether Islam and nations of Islamic orientation are capable of democracy or not. Nevertheless, in the case of Iraq it would seem necessary to take this question into account. In this connection there are two basically differing points of view: the "structural" and the "economic" approach.[6] Whereas the structural argument adopts the view that Islam and democracy are incompatible from the outset, the economic argument explains the actual democratic backwardness of nations of Islamic orientation with often inadequate means of democratic co-determination, low standards of development and, in

the past, lack of interest of western nations in changing the situation, often for geostrategic reasons or reasons of energy policy.

Carrying on from the economic approach and from what has been said so far about the role of the middle classes in the democratization process, it must be obvious that democratization is not a purely political process: there is also an inherent socio-economic dimension. Therefore, perhaps the first objective should be to establish well-ordered circumstances with widespread employment amongst the Iraqi population and to defuse the social conflict situations aroused by ethnicity and sectarianism.

The theory, according to which the democratization wave of the eighties and nineties, which swept through South America, Africa, parts of Asia and Eastern Europe, quietly passed Islam-oriented countries by, can be mitigated by numerous examples.[7] Udo Steinbach, chairman of the German Orientalist Institute, is convinced that in certain Islam-oriented nations there are elements of democratic processes incorporated into social and political order, which are entirely autocratically determined.[8] When examined more closely, the optimism expressed in Steinbach`s observation purely reflects a minimalism of democratic structures. This problem of democratic minimalism confronts the allies in Iraq today. It was hoped that the charisma of the USA would automatically encourage democratic culture in the country – as in Germany after the Second World War. A comparison between post-war Germany and post-war Iraq is often drawn. However, it is out of place for two reasons.

The fundamental difference between the two cases is the time factor. In Germany, after the war, it was only twelve years since the end of the Weimar Republic and its democratic structures and the majority of the German population still had a very precise idea – from past experience - of what democracy implied. Recent democratic experience is unknown in Iraq both in society as a whole and individually, as several generations have grown up under a corrupt system. In addition to this temporal dimension, the negative sentiments towards the USA in Iraq also have a determining influence. Whereas the Marshall Plan and protection from the Soviet threat provided mutual interests with post-war Germany, the situation in Iraq today is different: although Saddam Hussein's overthrow was welcomed as a liberation, there is generally great scepticism, both in Iraq and the Near East, as to the true motives and political ambitions of the USA in the region. Consequently the crisis of confidence, already described in the introduction, constitutes the greatest problem for the USA in conveying the attractions of democracy, since trust and reliability must serve as basis for democratic awareness, in Iraq as elsewhere. The loss of credibility has largely to do with the controversial role played again and again by the USA in the region. It may appear grotesque that Great Britain

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[5]For the US-American support for the Iraqi opposition see the homepage of Findlaw (1998): „Iraq Liberation Act of 1998", http://news.findlaw.com/hdocs/docs/iraq/libact103198.pdf, date of access: 2 January 2004. For Iraqi opposition see Fürtig, Henner (2003), „Die irakische Opposition zwischen Aufbruch und Resignation", Kai Hafez/ Birgit Schäbler (ed.), *Der Irak – Land zwischen Krieg und Frieden*, Heidelberg: pp.121-145.
[6]Cf. Steinbach, Udo (2003), „Irakische Fata Morgana: Projekt Demokratie in islamischen Ländern: zum Scheitern verurteilt?", *Internationale Politik: Europa-Archiv*, No.8, pp.11-18.

[7]Cf. ibid: 12ff. For the wave of democratization see Huntington, Samuel (1991), *The Third Wave. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman.
[8]Cf. Steinbach 2003: 12.

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of all countries, the former colonial power, and a western superpower such as the USA with a reputation in the Arab world for being imperialistic and Israel's protector, want to impose western concepts on a mainly Islam-oriented society. [9] The subsequent justification of the third Gulf War as the induction of an Iraqi democratization process by the USA, looks like a pretext, considering the original paradigm of Iraq's implication in terrorist activities and the danger from Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. These supposed threats are becoming increasingly difficult to uphold as time goes by. Could it be an excuse to divert from the true – possibly geostrategic and energy policy – interests? These questions raise sustained interest amongst the Iraqi general public and result in the USA and its concepts being greeted with cautious restraint, which protracts the democratization process still further. However, according to Steinbach an approach which queries the democratization of the country on the grounds of Islamic traditions, is inappropriate.

Regionalism and National Identity: In principle there is a distinct feeling of national identity in Iraq. Contrary to western beliefs, the Iraqis define themselves in the first instance as Iraqi citizens and only in the second instance as Shia, Sunnis, Turkmens or Kurds. This feeling of national identity has suffered through the outcome of the third Gulf War. The illusion that the Iraqis are one people with an Iraqi nationality, which only needs to give itself a democratic order has been shattered by the regime being overthrown by outsiders. Now that the pressure of the regime no longer applies, which guaranteed Iraq's integrity against separatist endeavours or demands for autonomy (if need be by using chemical weapons), the ethnic and cultural conflicts, formerly veiled by the system, are now coming to light – as they did after the disintegration of the USSR. With the end to repression, the various demographic groups in Iraq are giving voice to their demands and attempting to take advantage of the situation by calling for as many concessions as possible for the future. Whether it`s a question of greater autonomy or even hegemonial influence on the future state: the integrity of Iraqi territory is at stake.[10]

In this respect, mention should be made in particular of the Kurds in the north of the country, who may well make use of their chartered right to self-determination. Thanks to the heterogeneous constellation of the Iraqi population, regional forces are assuming advocacy for certain ethnic and cultural groups and supposedly exerting direct or indirect influence on the future development of Iraq in the interests of their clientele. Four main groups can be distinguished: The Iraqi Islamic Shia, who receive massive backing from Iran,

the Arab nationalist forces in Iraq – including former Baath party officials – supported by Syria and the Turkmen minority in the north of Iraq, supported by Turkey. In addition, there are the Wahhabits, who are funded by wealthy, influential social circles in Saudi Arabia and who are infiltrating the country across the open borders and radicalizing the political climate.

Turkey's objective is to prevent a Kurdish state, and the Wahhabits want to take advantage of the instable situation in Iraq to indoctrinate society with Islam and radicalize the country. By contrast, Syria and Iran have primarily national security interests at heart: if the democratization process succeeds in Iraq, both states – and in particular Iran as part of the "axis of evil" – fear that the USA may attempt to topple the regimes in Damascus and Teheran too. As Hasan Hussain (an Iraqi exile and publicist) puts it, it is therefore not a question of Iraqi interests, but of protecting oneself. The more coffins sent back to Washington the better. This is something the American public cannot bear, so Bush would be unlikely to risk another war in the Middle East.

So the attacks on allied troops and installations is grist to the mill of those who profit from the democratization in Iraq taking a heavy toll of lives. Constant attacks and clashes jeopardize order and security in Iraq and prevent a relaxation of tensions let alone a normalization of the situation. The effect is disastrous on the socio-economic dimension of democratization. Especially when public infrastructure is the target of sabotage. As long as the occupiers are unable to make visible progress, as long as socio-economic impetus cannot get off the ground, the attraction of the occupiers' democratic model forfeits its popularity. Radical ideas fall on fertile soil, the longer the political power vacuum lasts in Iraq. Due to the lack of experience of the Iraqi population with opinion-forming processes and because of the resultant relative political immaturity, the Iraqi electorate is easier to convince with mere words than with sensible programmes. However, this observation is not intended to foster the fear of an Islamic theocracy in Iraq. The majority of the Shia, who look to Iran, can be classified as moderate. Furthermore, they reject a theocracy on the Iranian model in Iraq, as it has proved inexpedient. Nevertheless, the increasing link between Iraqi demographic groups and foreign interests should not be trivialized. Regional influences will become more pronounced as time goes by and run counter to the integrity of Iraq. The question of the "national" development and future of Iraq can therefore only be answered in combination with the question of the influence of the regional powers.

3   Initiation of and Prospects for a Democratization Strategy

Tempus fugit: The element of time has repeatedly figured throughout the course of the preceding analysis of some determining factors for the political culture in Iraq. It is apparent that the situation regarding the implementation of democratic structures becomes more critical as time goes by. The main blame can be

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[9]For the relationship between Iraq and the West see Fürtig, Henner (1997), „Der Irak als Golem – Identitätskonflikte einer westlichen Schöpfung", Kai Hafez (ed.), Der Islam und der Westen – Anstiftung zum Dialog, Frankfurt/Main, pp.177-189.
[10] For the problem ob "tribalism" in Iraq see Jabar, Faleh A. (2003), „Der Stamm im Staat – Zur Wiederbelebung der Stammeskultur im Irak", Kai Hafez/ Birgit Schäbler (ed.), Der Irak – Land zwischen Krieg und Frieden, Heidelberg, pp.187-207.

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attributed to the USA, who when faced with supposed peace in post-war Iraq, was practically planless and even refused to consider concepts from third parties. Therefore, until beginning of August 2003, there was no progress in Iraq politically-speaking. Carried away by the over-confidence of a superpower, the USA committed the grave mistake of putting a military administration and Paul Bremer in charge of administration in Iraq and organization of a political system, almost excluding Iraqi participation. The fact that the Iraqi opposition in exile had already elaborated a plan was of no interest to the Bush administration.[11] After wasting much valuable time, a first political timetable for the democratization of Iraq was finally adopted on 15 November 2003. This plan confirms what had been emerging over the months: the incapability of the USA to make political progress without or even against the will of the Iraqi population. Not until the Iraqis resolutely demanded at least a right of co-determination as condition for their cooperation and it became apparent that the heavily armed allied forces had no formula against the increasing non-military resistance in Iraq, did the superpower change its attitude. The allies' glorious military victory with ensuing masterly propaganda campaign gradually came to ressemble a political Pyrrhic victory – to the present day.

Now everyone is anxious to put the November 2003 plan into action as swiftly as possible and to strengthen the powers of the Iraqi Governing Council. Above all, the Iraqi side must be taken seriously and the fastest possible transfer of power to the Iraqis be of the utmost interest. "By June 30, 2004 the new transitional administration will be recognized by the Coalition, and will assume full sovereign powers for governing Iraq. The CPA will dissolve."[12] At the same time, the allied forces must withdraw from the scene in the towns and – before their final retreat – retire to their barracks out of the sight of the Iraqi general public. Only then can a new Iraqi constitution be elaborated and a sovereign Iraqi government set to work on a multitude of fundamental tasks still obstructing the path to democracy. The main pre-requisite for the welfare of society and restoration of a democratically oriented middle class is economic growth. To this end, temporary nationalization of the mineral oil resources would seem a necessary step. If security, order and stability are guaranteed, and Iraqi democracy can boast first political and economic achievements, then satisfaction of the Iraqi population with the system will rapidly increase.

Until this happens, danger threatens in particular from radical Islamic and Arab nationalist protagonists, who take advantage of the Iraqi population's increasing disappointment and disenchantment with politics to further their cause. The result could be resignation and rejection of the democratization process, as well as a considerable radicalization of society in favour of extremist forces. In parallel, the influence of regional forces in Iraq is on the increase, calling for inner political insubordination and centrifugal tendencies, which could indirectly jeopardize the integrity of Iraqi territory.

Further delay is counter-productive to democratization. But if democratization were realized as described above, there are real prospects of a stable democracy being established on Iraqi territory. Steinbach's restrictive criterium that low levels of development hinder democratisation does not apply in Iraq. The oil reserves as national capital and a high standard of education afford promising prospects for the implementation of democratic structures. However, the western allies should not risk losing the last remaining crumbling confidence of the Iraqi population by tactical intrigues to maintain spheres of interest. According to Udo Steinbach, the most effective way of promoting democratization would be to back civilian forces and leave it to them in their discussions with their governments to create a system to suit themselves. In the end this would be a synthesis of the fundamental elements of a modern democracy, combined with elements of religion and culture, of historical experience and social structures. Systems adopted or even imposed from outside would not result in stable solutions.[13] It is time for enduring solutions.

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[11] Cf. the homepage of the U.S. Department of State (2003): „Future of Iraq Project", http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/dutyiraq, date of access: 3 January 2004.

[12] Homepage of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) (2003): "Agreement on Political Process", http://www.cpa-iraq.org/audio/20031115_Nov-15-GC-CPA-Final_Agreement-post.htm, date of access: 3 January 2004.

[13] Cf. Steinbach 2003: 18.

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