

[tyranny of the majority]

# Baghdad Isn't Berlin

Free elections and popular power entail grave risks for the Middle East.

By Tom Switzer

WHEN NEOCONSERVATIVES rose to intellectual prominence in the 1970s, they were invariably described—not least by themselves—as “liberals mugged by reality.” Three decades later, that definition will acquire even more resonance if the neoconservative effort to remake Iraq as a viable and peaceful democratic state ends in failure.

Recently, of course, the consensus about the Bush administration's record in Iraq and the broader Middle East has been far from negative. Even opponents of the U.S.-led invasion have good things to say about President Bush's foreign policy agenda. “The most difficult sentence in the English language,” concedes the *Toronto Star's* Richard Gwyn, “is short and simple. It is this: Bush was right.” A *Le Monde* editorial titled “Arab Spring” concedes “the merit of George W. Bush.” The *Guardian's* Jonathan Freedland says, “the dark cloud of the Iraq war may have carried a silver lining.” *Der Spiegel's* Claus Christian Malzahn compares President Bush's beligerence towards Arab dictators to President Reagan's rollback of the Soviet Empire. And left-wing politicians from Teddy Kennedy in the U.S. to Piero Fassino in Italy admit Saddam Hussein's downfall has intensified pressure for democracy in the Middle East.

No wonder neoconservatives are giddy about the prospects for democratizing the Middle East—and not just the Kristol-Kagan-Krauthammer cabal either.

According to Lebanese socialist leader Walid Jumblatt, “It's strange for me to say it, but this process of change has started because of the American invasion of Iraq.” Jumblatt—who had earlier said, “We are all happy when an American soldier is killed” in Iraq and who had complained it was “too bad” that Paul Wolfowitz escaped a rocket blast at his Baghdad hotel in October 2003—now says, “The Syrian people, the Egyptian people, all say that something is changing. The Berlin Wall has fallen.”

Is this really true? Are we witnessing the dawn of a global democratic revolution? And will we, as leading neocon Richard Perle has predicted, “look back on the liberation of Iraq and the subsequent establishment of a decent, humane government there as a turning point in history”?

Certainly such hopes will be boosted in the wake of last month's belated appointments of Iraq's president, Kurdish rebel leader Jalal Talabani, and his two (Shi'ite and Sunni) vice presidents. And indeed it would be wrong and churlish to dismiss the significance of what has happened across the region in recent months. The Palestinian elections, the Iraqi elections, Saudi Arabia's first municipal elections, Hosni Mubarak's call for political pluralism in Egypt, and the massive anti-Syrian mobilization in Lebanon—all of this appears to confirm everything that the president says about the universal

yearning for freedom. Give individuals a right to choose their own leaders, and they will seize the moment. Who could forget the images of brave Iraqis dodging bullets at the ballot box?

Yes, yes, yes, all true. But that being acknowledged, it is well to remember that these are early days and although Iraq's long political stalemate is apparently drawing to a close, there is still treacherous ground to cover. There are serious reasons to be tentative in one's judgment of the changes taking place not only in Iraq but in the broader Middle East today. Indeed, far from ushering in a new era of democratic prosperity, the “Arab Spring” could lead to a period of virulent anti-Americanism and Islamic extremism.

After all, one election does not a democracy make. To work, democracy requires, among other things, a consensus among the major religious and regional groups that they are one people. And it requires that the losers respect the rights of the winners to rule and the electoral majority respect the rights of the minority to the untrammelled benefits of civil society—including freedom of speech, organization, religion, and an impartial judicial system. That is, a democracy has to embrace the idea of a loyal opposition.

One only has to look at the results of the Jan. 30 elections—how the south voted overwhelmingly for the Shi'ite bloc, how the north voted likewise for

the Kurds, and how the Sunni vote was repressed in the middle—to see that the Iraqis do not have a sense of being one people. Far from dividing on nationwide issues, they behaved as distinct regional communities, voting as their religious and ethnic interests dictated. Indeed, the dominant groups occupying distinct parts of the country are so wary of one another that it's more appropriate to refer to three Iraqi peoples. (Whatever happened, incidentally, to the party of the provisional government's Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, which ostensibly carried the flag for Western secular liberal values? It lost badly and has been isolated and removed from power.)

Then there is the issue of minority rights. Winning an election is one thing; losing it is another thing altogether—particularly in an arbitrarily created state and ethnically and tribally fractured society that, unlike post-war Germany and Japan, has had no real experience with the rule of law and all the institutions that democracy needs in order to flourish. If the Sunnis continue to resent their loss of power brought about by Saddam's downfall and to fear religious persecution at the hands of the Shi'ite majority, they might think that their only recourse is violence.

Even Larry Diamond, a former senior adviser to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad who is a leading expert on democratization, recognizes the problem. "Unless a way is found to incorporate [the principal Sunni tribal and religious constituencies] through direct negotiations, which give meaningful positions to individuals chosen by these communities themselves, the insurgency will continue." Writing in the *Wall Street Journal* on April 14, he warned, "Only if disaffected Sunni leaders are given a real stake in the new political order will they take the kind of rhetorical and organizational steps that will lead their communities to cease the

violent struggle and to expel the foreign jihadists who are helping to wage it." The insurgency that inflames the Sunni heartland suggests that the signs are far from promising.

True, more than 60 Sunni clerics and scholars, who supported a boycott of the election, recently encouraged Sunni Iraqis to join the nation's fledgling army in order to prevent things from falling apart. Attacks on coalition forces have declined in recent months. And several conciliatory gestures—from the offers of amnesty to Sunni insurgents to the appointment of a Sunni parliamentary speaker—are all part of a fresh national reconciliation campaign.

But Sunni leaders have also called for attacks against Shi'ites, and bombs have killed hundreds of Shi'ites in retaliation for their routine killings of Sunnis suspected of Ba'athist ties. The Shi'ite-dominated United Iraqi Alliance, moreover, has defied the Pentagon's warnings and is demanding the purge of Sunni security forces left over from Saddam's era—a move that could encourage more

would obviously be an improvement over Saddam's gulag. But the prospect of a collapse of the Iraqi state, where three peoples use democracy to break away from each other, or a civil war, where those three peoples fight a new war of their own, seems a real possibility as soon as the coalition withdraws its troops.

There is another reason to be wary of democracy's prospects in the Middle East: elections can lead to unintended consequences. In November 2003, President Bush said, "For too long many people in the region have been victims and subjects; they deserve to be active citizens."

But what if "active citizens" in Palestine freely elect the Hamas leader? What if "active citizens" in Saudi Arabia prefer an Islamist zealot in the mold of Osama bin Laden to a moderate reformer like Crown Prince Abdullah? What if "active citizens" in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon bring to power jihadists and terrorist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood or Hezbollah? And what if the dominant

WHAT IF "ACTIVE CITIZENS" IN PALESTINE **FREELY ELECT THE HAMAS LEADER?** WHAT IF "ACTIVE CITIZENS" IN SAUDI ARABIA **PREFER AN ISLAMIST ZEALOT** IN THE MOLD OF **OSAMA BIN LADEN** TO A MODERATE REFORMER LIKE CROWN PRINCE ABDULLAH?

Ba'athist officials to join the insurgency. Add to this the increasingly independent Kurds, who will not even allow Arab units of the new Iraqi military onto their territory, and you may well have a prescription for an unbreakable cycle of violence.

Of course, a complicated semi-federal structure could somehow emerge in Iraq, and the predominant Shi'ites and resentful Sunnis could reach some limited partial accommodation. Such an outcome, to be sure,

Shi'ite political figure in the new Iraq government, Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari, seeks inspiration and guidance from Iran's mullahs?

The point here is that because these nations are still modernizing, they are open to all the disturbing and dislocating ideological forces that this process can unleash, which is why democracy could degenerate into plebiscites that, far from leading to moderate and sensible governments, would only add legitimacy to authoritarianism and extrem-

ism. In the early '90s, fundamentalist Islamists won free and more or less fair elections in Algeria.

There is another way of looking at this. Try selling the people of Cairo, Damascus, or Riyadh a liberal secular agenda—a bill of rights that gives infidels the right to preach, homosexuals the right to practice, Larry Flynt and Salman Rushdie the right to publish, and every woman and wife the right to fornicate freely and have an abortion—and you'd want the authoritarian dictators to save you from the will of the "active citizens."

With Iraq giving every sense of turning into an open-ended Mesopotamian morass from which there seems to be no exit, it is hardly surprising that Wilsonian imperialists hope to see a proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. But the triumphalist cheering over the recent changes in the Muslim world may turn out to be, at best, seriously premature and, at worse, just plain wrong.

George W. Bush has made a song and dance about how "the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad will be recorded, alongside the fall of the Berlin Wall, as one of the great moments in the history of liberty." But as that liberal hawk Thomas Friedman has conceded that the wall "will fall one bloody brick at a time and, unfortunately, Vaclav Havel, Lech Walesa and Solidarity are not waiting to jump into our arms on the other side." There is a real possibility that the more democratic the Middle East becomes, the more Islamist, authoritarian, and anti-American it will be. If indeed that happens, those misguided idealists who signed up for this misbegotten venture will well and truly get mugged by reality. ■

*Tom Switzer is opinion page editor of The Australian in Sydney. These are his personal views.*

[banned parenthood]

## Fathers Into Felons

No-fault divorce has turned a bastion of private life into a colony of the state.

By Stephen Baskerville

BY ALL INDICATIONS, we are gearing up for a major cultural and political war over the family. Opposition to same-sex marriage has tapped a vein of grassroots outrage that may run deeper than most observers imagine, with implications extending to the welfare state, the judiciary, and the most fundamental questions about the role of government. Conservatives who warn that family breakdown will lead to civilizational collapse sometimes seem incapable of recognizing the fulfillment of their prophecies.

The family crisis is generally attributed to deteriorating moral norms stemming from the sexual revolution. Yet the warfare over marriage is as much political as cultural, though basic political questions are conspicuously avoided: what precisely is the legal status of marriage, and what is the appropriate role of the state in private families and households? What are the relations of church and state insofar as each claims authority over marriage?

Family scholar Bryce Christensen likens the family crisis to the Civil War, with constitutional implications that could prove equally profound. G.K. Chesterton once suggested that the family serves as the principal check on government power and predicted that someday the two would directly confront one another. Same-sex marriage is

just one indication that that day has arrived.

Another is the administration's plan to redirect welfare funds for marriage education. Adapting Clinton-era fatherhood initiatives, the program is justified on the principle that marriage is a public institution conferring public benefits. "The time has come to recognize that marriage is a public social good," writes Alliance for Marriage President Matt Daniels. "The health of American families—built upon marriage—affects us all."

Yet the public nature of marriage is a truism that requires some qualification. The common-law tradition has long treated the family as a preserve of privacy that is largely off-limits to government—what Justice Byron White called a "realm of family life which the state cannot enter."

Family inviolability was never absolute, but the basic principle has been established for centuries and most emphatically in connection with what traditionalists point out is the unique and foremost purpose of marriage: raising children. The private family creates a legal bond between parent and child that allows parents (within reasonable limits) to raise their children free from government interference. "Whatever else it may accomplish, marriage acknowledges and secures the relation