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# How Do We Build Democracy In Iraq? Identifying the Theoretical Foundations of the U.S. Effort to Bring Stable Democracy to Iraq

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# How Do We Build Democracy In Iraq? Identifying the Theoretical Foundations of the U.S. Effort to Bring Stable Democracy to Iraq

## **Abstract**

The project to build a stable democracy in Iraq presents an unparalleled opportunity to better understand the processes of democratization, and to therefore improve our grand theories about how democracy emerges. In order to do this, it is crucial to first know what theories are invoked or suggested by U.S. policy in Iraq. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to identify the theoretical foundations of the intellectual debate within the U.S. foreign policy community concerning democratization in Iraq. It is my hope that by knowing what theoretical approaches are implied in the policies and recommendations of foreign policy elites, we may also know better how these approaches have stood up to the test of real world application. The subjects of this analysis are not only government officials, but also anyone who has had a significant influence in the discourse within the U.S. foreign policy establishment. This includes public commentators, academics, and former advisors to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq. The arguments each of these opinion leaders make can be grouped into four theoretical approaches—democratic universalism, political culture, sequentialism, and rational choice. Opinion leaders rarely adhere exclusively to one approach, and their application of multiple approaches frequently leads to incompatibilities. I identify which approaches are used, inconsistencies in argument, and deeper problems with the theoretical approaches themselves. Finally, I examine the implications of the experience in Iraq for the theoretical approaches, finding that while democratic universalism has been nearly discredited, the other three approaches do still offer useful frameworks for understanding democratization, despite their own shortcomings.

## **Keywords**

democratization, Iraq, U.S. foreign policy, democratic theory, Social Sciences, Political Science, Ian Lustick, Lustick, Ian

# **HOW DO WE BUILD DEMOCRACY IN IRAQ?**

Identifying the Theoretical Foundations of the U.S. Effort to Bring  
Stable Democracy to Iraq

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March 30, 2007

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The project to build a stable democracy in Iraq presents an unparalleled opportunity to better understand the processes of democratization, and to therefore improve our grand theories about how democracy emerges. In order to do this, it is crucial to first know what theories are invoked or suggested by U.S. policy in Iraq. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to identify the theoretical foundations of the intellectual debate within the U.S. foreign policy community concerning democratization in Iraq. It is my hope that by knowing what theoretical approaches are implied in the policies and recommendations of foreign policy elites, we may also know better how these approaches have stood up to the test of real world application.

The subjects of this analysis are not only government officials, but also anyone who has had a significant influence in the discourse within the U.S. foreign policy establishment. This includes public commentators, academics, and former advisors to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq. The arguments each of these opinion leaders make can be grouped into four theoretical approaches—democratic universalism, political culture, sequentialism, and rational choice. Opinion leaders rarely adhere exclusively to one approach, and their application of multiple approaches frequently leads to incompatibilities. I identify which approaches are used, inconsistencies in argument, and deeper problems with the theoretical approaches themselves. Finally, I examine the implications of the experience in Iraq for the theoretical approaches, finding that while democratic universalism has been nearly discredited, the other three approaches do still offer useful frameworks for understanding democratization, despite their own shortcomings.

## INTRODUCTION

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The U.S. effort to build a lasting, liberal democracy in Iraq is a project of unprecedented ambition. Until the United States toppled Saddam Hussein's ruthless regime in March 2003, the Ba'ath party had dominated Iraq for over thirty years. Furthermore, Iraq's neighborhood remains a stronghold of autocracy and authoritarianism that has proven very resistant to democratic reform. These facts alone would tend to deter outside powers from grand plans of democratization, but the United States has nevertheless undertaken a sweeping endeavor to construct the Arab world's first liberal, pro-Western democracy. While much attention in the American press and academic world has been focused on uncovering the true motivations for this bold mission, an equally interesting and important question that should be asked is how U.S. foreign policy elites believed the goal of democratization would actually be accomplished. If we are to learn anything from the U.S. experience in Iraq about the genesis and survival of democracy, we must first understand what ideas about democratization were applied and how they have fared.

The issue of how the United States could or could not bring democracy to Iraq was, and still is, the subject of a heated intellectual debate among academics, commentators, Administration officials, and other members of the U.S. foreign policy establishment. It is my aim to reveal what grand theories about democracy each of these contributors used or implied in their arguments, and to see what the application of their ideas can tell us about the theories themselves. As will be shown, the arguments put forth in the foreign policy debate can be grouped into four categories according to their theoretical approach—democratic universalism, political culture, sequentialism, or rational choice. While the subjects of this paper rarely made arguments based purely on a single school of thought, they were consistent enough for us to

make judgments about how the theoretical approaches they invoked have stood up to the test of reality. The results of these judgments are mixed. On one hand, the experience in Iraq has discredited democratic universalism as a useful way to understand democratization. On the other hand, it has demonstrated that sequentialist, political culture, and rational actor theories all remain useful approaches in their own way to understanding how democracy comes about and endures.

While any study of foreign policy must include the government officials who actually execute policy, it is also important to examine the thoughts of those outside of government who have had a strong influence on the public debate and U.S. policy on the ground in Iraq. Policy is never formulated in a sealed vacuum, even in this Administration. Therefore, this paper's analysis will include the recommendations of those thinkers who have led opinions in the U.S. foreign policy establishment regarding the democratization of Iraq—widely read commentators, influential experts, academics who have advised the Administration, and, of course, official policymakers. The group of foreign policy elites studied here is by no means an exhaustive one, but it does represent those individuals whose ideas about democratizing Iraq have been most prominent in public discourse and U.S. policy.

The theoretical foundations and implications of contemporary arguments are more evident in some cases than others. Nevertheless, it is important to understand exactly how present-day opinion leaders use the classic theories to support their reasoning. For instance, while two commentators may belong to the same school of thought, they may stress different aspects of the same theory and thereby arrive at different conclusions. As such, this paper will examine those opinion leaders whose works explicitly cite classic democratic theories as well as those whose commentary merely implies or suggests them.

Before continuing, it is important to first firmly grasp what is possibly the hardest word to define in political science—democracy. Among the opinion leaders studied here, and the theories their arguments imply, the definition varies. However, for the purposes of this paper it will suffice to define democracy as a system of representative government characterized by the rule of law, minority rights, and checks on arbitrary power through some sort of regular or frequent elections. A second important clarification to keep in mind is the distinction between the emergence of democracy and its persistence. While the democratic theories are usually careful to distinguish between the two concepts, contemporary opinion leaders often talk about democratization as if transition and consolidation are the same thing. This conceptual confusion is not so problematic for this study, however, because in Iraq we are concerned with both aspects. Also, even if opinion leaders are ambiguous with their terms, we are able to deduce from their arguments to which aspect of democratization they are referring.

Keeping these clarifications in mind, this paper will proceed as follows. It will first review the classic theories of democracy implied or suggested in contemporary discourse concerning Iraq. From there it will proceed to the examination of how these theories appear in the intellectual debate, as inferred from writings, public statements, and interviews. After that, it will explore the theoretical inconsistencies of opinion leaders' arguments, followed by a discussion of the implications of the Iraqi experience for the theories themselves.



## **1. OVERVIEW OF THE RELEVANT CLASSIC THEORIES OF DEMOCRACY**

While the following overview of classic theories of democratic origins is by no means an exhaustive one, it does cover those theories that are most pertinent to my analysis—namely, those theories that correlate with the beliefs and practices of contemporary American foreign policy elites. Though many of these grand theories may be linked together in various ways, they are best grouped into the following four main categories: (1) Universalist theories that assume all societies both want and are capable of democratic government, regardless of historical and cultural legacies or level of economic development; (2) Theories that are sociological in outlook, meaning they are based on arguments about culture, values, and social organization; (3) Theories that stress certain conditions as prerequisites of democracy, specifically economic development and state capacity; and (4) Theories that view the formation of a democratic system primarily as a collective action problem involving the interests and choices of rational political actors. While many of the authors of these theories have altered their positions with time, I will nevertheless focus on those of their works that continue to have a lasting impact in the realms of political science and foreign policy.

### ***Democratic Universalist Approach***

Notions of universal and natural rights to individual autonomy have existed as coherent modes of thought since the time of the Enlightenment. It was not until the early twentieth century, however, that the idea of democratic government as a universal possibility became widely accepted. No one did more at that time to promulgate this idea than President Woodrow Wilson, whose name has since become synonymous with the thinking that all societies both want and can sustain democratic government. For the purposes of this paper, it will suffice to label this

approach or theory of democracy's origins as democratic universalism, though it has also been referred to simply as Wilsonian thought.

The core idea of democratic universalist thinking is that democracy can take root anywhere and anytime, so long as people are free from tyranny and allowed to choose their system of government. This notion—that democracy needs no prerequisites other than freedom from despotism—was given academic weight in a highly influential 1970 article by Dankwart Rustow entitled “Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model.”<sup>1</sup> In his article, Rustow responded to what he considered a logical fallacy among the democratic theorists of his day, namely the confusion between causation and correlation. Rather than assuming that certain conditions are always independent variables and that democracy always the dependent variable, he wrote that “[a]ny genetic theory of democracy would do well to assume a two-way flow of causality, or some form of circular interaction, between politics on the one hand and economic and social conditions on the other.”<sup>2</sup> Moreover, he disparaged the idea that in order to have democracy, the members of a society must be changed somehow into committed democrats, through “preachment, propaganda, education, or perhaps as an automatic byproduct of growing prosperity.”<sup>3</sup> In place of this narrow causal view, “we should allow for the possibility that circumstances may force, trick, lure, or cajole nondemocrats into democratic behavior and that their beliefs may adjust in due course by some process of rationalization or adaptation.”<sup>4</sup>

If it is possible that the economic and social conditions that have frequently been held up as prerequisites for democracy are merely co-requisites, or even byproducts, then it is plausible that democracy is a universally attainable form of government—if no society can be deemed to

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<sup>1</sup> Dankwart Rustow, “Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model,” *Comparative Politics* 2, no. 3 (April 1970): 337-363.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 344-345.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

lack the necessary conditions, then anyone can do it. Rustow, however, did specify one condition, “that the vast majority of citizens in a democracy-to-be must have no doubt or mental reservations as to which political community they belong to.”<sup>5</sup> From this single condition he derived three others: “entrenched and serious conflict,” “conscious adoption of democratic rules,” and the habituation of the politicians and people to these rules.<sup>6</sup> Other than these, however, he deemed other prerequisites to be implausible or logically fallacious. With the coming of the Third Wave of Democracy just years after the publication of his article, Rustow’s thesis gained credibility and notoriety, providing strong support for the democratic universalist approach to understanding the emergence of democracy.

### ***Sociological Approach***

In opposition to the tenets of democratic universalism, the sociological school assumes that democracy requires certain cultural and social transformations before it can emerge and become a viable and sustainable system for government. The first work of the sociological category we turn to is *The Civic Culture* by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba,<sup>7</sup> in which the authors presented the findings of an empirical study of attitudes towards the democratic political process in five countries: the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Mexico. Their purpose was to ascertain how the values and beliefs of citizens in separate democratic countries differ, and to infer from these differences how a country’s political culture affects its propensity for a stable democratic system. The conclusions they drew from their data—that the attitudes of citizens towards their political system have “important effects on the way the political system

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 350.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 361.

<sup>7</sup> Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963).

operates”—and the resulting model they advanced have proven to be very influential in the quest to understand how democracy takes root.<sup>8</sup>

Almond and Verba defined their independent variable, political culture, as “the particular distribution of patterns of orientation toward political objects among the members of the nation.”<sup>9</sup> They grouped these patterns of orientation into three categories:

1. “cognitive orientation,” that is, the knowledge of and belief about the political system, its roles and the incumbents of these roles, its inputs, and its outputs...
2. “affective orientation,” or feelings about the political system, its roles, personnel, and performance...
3. “evaluational orientation,” the judgments and opinions about the political objects that typically involve the combination of value standards and criteria with information and feelings.<sup>10</sup>

How citizens regard their political system—how much they know about it, how they feel about it, and what they think about it—as well as how they regard their own roles as individuals in the system determine the type of political culture. In a “*parochial political culture*,” members know little about their government and therefore do not hold strong feelings toward it. They also do not see a particular role for themselves in the process. In a “*subject political culture*,” members are aware of their political system and have opinions about it, but they do not regard themselves as active participants. By contrast, in a “*participant political culture*” members are aware of the political system and its workings, hold opinions about it, and consider themselves as being able to play an active role in its operation.<sup>11</sup>

Political cultures never fall exclusively into the parochial, subject, or participant categories. Rather, they are a mix of these three orientations, with each society exhibiting its own unique proportion. Furthermore, the structure of a political system can be “congruent,”

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 17-19.

meaning it is in line with the political culture. For example, a parochial political culture would be congruent with a traditional political system where there is no widespread political participation. The “*civic culture*,” then, is the ideal case for democracy to survive, for it “is a participant political culture in which the political culture and political structure are congruent.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, according to Almond and Verba the most propitious circumstance for democracy is one in which members of a society are positively oriented toward participation in the political process and where the system is structured so that they have the opportunity to participate in it. Without such a civic culture, a democratic form of government is unlikely to last.

With the link between political culture and form of government established, the only missing piece of the puzzle is finding how a civic culture comes about. However, from their empirical results Almond and Verba were only able to describe how civic culture is perpetuated, not created. They concluded that “[t]he civic culture is transmitted by a complex process that includes training in many social institutions—family, peer group, school, work place, as well as in the political system itself,” and through this complex process, “each new generation absorbs the civic culture through exposure to the political attitudes and behavior of the preceding generation.”<sup>13</sup> But as for the genesis of a civic culture, and therefore democracy itself, they could only recommend more education combined with patience for the sluggish pace of social change.

The second theoretical proponent of the sociological approach we consider here is Harry Eckstein. In his 1996 article “Lessons for the ‘Third Wave’ from the First,”<sup>14</sup> he articulated and refined ideas of democratization that he first began expounding with his 1961 monograph “A

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 498-499.

<sup>14</sup> Harry Eckstein, “Lessons for the Third Wave from the First: An Essay on Democratization,” *Center for the Study of Democracy*, Paper 96-02 (November 1996), <http://repositories.cdlib.org/csd/96-02>.

Theory of Stable Democracy” and his 1966 book *Division and Cohesion in Democracy*.<sup>15</sup> Like Almond and Verba, Eckstein believed that “*viable democracy requires an appropriate political and general culture, and this, in turn, a social structure appropriate for such a culture.*”<sup>16</sup> An appropriate culture would be one in which members trust one another, cooperate with each other, and participate in civil society organizations. More than the actual content of cultural attitudes, however, Eckstein was concerned with whether or not a people had the “general contours of social life that can accommodate a considerable, even if not limitless, variety of contents.”<sup>17</sup> Because he found different stable democracies to display very different attitudes and institutional content, he proposed that the form matters more than the content.

By form Eckstein meant the way that social life is organized. In stable democracy, he argued, “governmental and social authority patterns are highly congruent.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, there are institutions and social organizations other than the government that exhibit democratic norms and practices. There should be “a large number of ‘secondary groups,’ particularly organized associations, in which many members of society participate and which intervene between national authority on the one hand and individuals and their primary groups on the other.”<sup>19</sup> If the government and other smaller institutions are “congruent” in this way, then people will be socialized in everyday life to the norms and practices necessary to have a democratic state.

Eckstein took the cultural argument a step further by saying that “*democratization should proceed gradually, incrementally, and by the use of syncretic devices.*”<sup>20</sup> Rather than wiping the

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<sup>15</sup> Both can be found in Harry Eckstein, *Division and Cohesion in Democracy: A Study of Norway* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966).

<sup>16</sup> Eckstein, “Lessons for the Third Wave,” 14. Emphasis in original.

<sup>17</sup> Eckstein, *Division and Cohesion*, 185.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>20</sup> Eckstein, “Lessons for the Third Wave,” 11. Emphasis in original.

slate completely clean, democratization should proceed slowly and “graft on to what exists.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, new democratic institutions and conventions should be structured around traditional formations of authority so that the political culture is better able to adapt.

Unlike Almond and Verba, Eckstein gave specific recommendations in his more recent article for democratization and the fostering of a suitable political culture. He prescribed a “comprehensive, explicit, detailed, and scheduled agenda” that involves the writing of a constitution, the organization of parties, and the “incorporation of the inherited bureaucracy into the democratic order.”<sup>22</sup> In order to develop a democratic political culture, he recommended the creation of local governments and non-governmental associations that are congruent with the democratic norms of the central government. In this way, after a generation or two, citizens will be adequately socialized to the ways of democracy.

Another important theory about political culture is put forward in Seymour Martin Lipset’s landmark book *Political Man*.<sup>23</sup> Lipset argued that “[t]he stability of any given democracy depends not only on economic development but also upon the effectiveness and the legitimacy of its political system.”<sup>24</sup> By “legitimacy” he meant the “capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society,” a task that depends upon the attitudes of the various important groups within society, who “regard a political system as legitimate or illegitimate according to the way in which its values fit with theirs.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, democracy will take root in situations where important groups, such as the aristocracy or military, see such a system of government as according with their values and attitudes.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>23</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1963).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

### *Sequentialist Approach*

The primary concern of sequentialist theories, also frequently labeled modernization theories, is the relationship between the nature of a country's political system, its level of economic development, and the strength of its state. The common characteristic of such theories is that they prescribe an ideal sequence for the process of democratization, most often along the lines of economic and state development followed by elections and democratic government.

In the field of political science, Seymour Martin Lipset's book *Political Man* stands out as a milestone in the sequentialist area. In it Lipset writes that "all the various aspects of economic development—industrialization, urbanization, wealth, and education—are so closely interrelated as to form one major factor which has the political correlate of democracy."<sup>26</sup> Increased industrialization and wealth contribute to a larger middle class, which "tempers conflict by rewarding moderate and democratic parties and penalizing extremist groups."<sup>27</sup> Increased wealth also has the added effect of easing the anxieties of those who already are affluent or powerful. If there is greater wealth and economic equality "it does not make too much difference whether some redistribution takes place," and so "it is easier to accept the idea that it does not matter greatly which side is in power."<sup>28</sup> By contrast, with greater inequality the stakes of the political game become much higher, and those in power will be much more reluctant to relinquish control. Other results of economic development, such as education and participation in civil society groups, also serve to promote democratic principles and therefore the emergence of democratic governance.

More recent work by Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongo aims to more accurately define the relationship between economic development and democracy. The two dispute what

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



they see as a misunderstanding of Lipset's central claim, that democracy is "secreted out of dictatorships by economic development" and is thus a mere by-product of economic activities.<sup>29</sup> Instead they assert that whether a society is democratic or authoritarian is decided by the goals of political actors, which are independent of development. Dictatorships fall for various reasons, like wars or the death of the dictator himself. Where economic development becomes relevant, they conclude, is in determining whether or not a democracy will survive once it has already come into being—they are concerned with the endurance of democracy, and not so much its genesis. Through a cross-national study of authoritarian breakdown and development, they find that democracy "can be initiated at any level of development," but that "the chances for the survival of democracy are greater when the country is richer."<sup>30</sup> This is a pattern that also holds for dictatorships. In addition, they find that declining economic performance is particularly dangerous for democratic regimes. In all, they aim to refute the deterministic idea that economic development leads inevitably to democratic development—it may prepare some countries better than others, but it does not predict when an authoritarian regime will fall—while at the same time giving support to Lipset's thesis that democracy is still strongly correlated with economic factors.

Another important angle to the sequentialist approach was first explored deeply in Samuel Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies*.<sup>31</sup> In this book, Huntington emphasized what he saw as the supreme importance of establishing political authority, or state capacity. Because he noted that the purpose of government is to govern, he said "[t]he most important political distinction among countries concerns not their form of government but their

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<sup>29</sup> Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongo, "Modernization: Theories and Facts," *World Politics* 49, no. 2 (January 1997): 156.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>31</sup> Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).

degree of government.”<sup>32</sup> He criticized the idea that economic development leads to stability, claiming that “economic development and political stability are two independent goals and progress toward one has no necessary connection with progress toward the other.”<sup>33</sup> If political stability is desired, then the focus should be on accumulating state power. Contrary to typical American ideas about limited government and checks and balances in democracy, Huntington insisted that “[a]uthority has to exist before it can be limited, and it is authority that is in scarce supply in those modernizing countries where government is at the mercy of alienated intellectuals, rambunctious colonels, and rioting students.”<sup>34</sup>

Because the United States had a comparatively easy time of consolidating power in a central government, he wrote, Americans tend to persist in wanting to draw up constitutions and holding elections like their own when attempting to foster democracy. This is a flawed approach, according to Huntington, because “[t]he problem is not to hold elections but to create organizations. In many, if not most, modernizing countries elections serve only to enhance the power of disruptive and often reactionary social forces and to tear down the structure of public authority.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, Huntington advocated a sequential approach to establishing stability. In order to create a lasting, stable order of any kind, democratic or authoritarian, the primary objective must be to create effective, legitimate, and unchallenged political institutions that can govern the entire population. Before the government can be sure that it is the supreme authority of the land, it should not hold elections or shape itself into a democratic form. Therefore, democracy is most likely to be stable and enduring when there exist strong and effective political institutions.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 7.

### ***Rational Choice Approach***

Almost since the beginning of the emergence of political science as a discipline in its own right, there has existed an approach to understanding political behavior that rests on the assumption of rationality. Such a rational choice approach—also commonly referred to as the economic<sup>36</sup> approach, owing to its shared assumptions with those of the field of economics—assumes that actors are self-interested beings that pursue goals using what they calculate are the most efficient means. In the theories discussed in this section, constructing a democracy is a matter of satisfying the wants and needs of the actors involved and ensuring that their utility will be maximized in a democratic system. In other words, it is the interests of people involved, and not their values or norms, that are most important in determining whether a society will have a democratic government. While these theories vary in their specific content and objectives, they are all similar in that they treat democratization as a collective action problem involving many different and sometimes conflicting interests.

The first rationalist model we examine is seen in Mancur Olson’s work *The Logic of Collective Action*.<sup>37</sup> In this book, Olson attacked what he called the traditional view among economists that rational and self-interested individuals will act to attain a common good. Rather, he claimed that “unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, *rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests.*”<sup>38</sup> The premise underlying this reasoning is that the larger the group, the more the common good must be divided and distributed among individuals or subgroups,

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<sup>36</sup> “Economic” in the sense that actors weigh the costs and benefits of expending scarce resources in order to achieve some end. This is not to be confused with theories of modernization that deal with issues of economic development.

<sup>37</sup> Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982 ed.).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. Emphasis in the original.

diminishing the benefit to each. Furthermore, the larger the group, the higher the costs of organization. Therefore, in cases where collective action by a large group is required to attain a common good, rational individuals will not contribute to the effort. The only way to inspire individuals and subgroups to act, according to Olson, is to either threaten punishment or offer incentives. Because of this, he explained, organizations like trade unions must offer additional benefits as incentives to join their ranks, and the federal government must levy taxes in order to pay for collective goods like national defense programs.

Applied to democratization, Olson's theory predicts that a large group of individuals and interested parties—whether they are organized by ethnicity, religion, language, social status, or economic interests—will not collectively and spontaneously act to achieve the common good of democracy. Rather, there must be some other factor compelling them to choose democracy. One way could be if each group can be sure to accrue some sort of benefit in addition to that of living in a democratic system, such as a guaranteed position of power or access to natural resources. Another way democracy could emerge in Olson's model is if a powerful actor who has the potential to dominate fails to do so, or chooses not to do so. In this way, while no actors achieve their optimum outcome, no one has to face their least desired outcome of oppression. In short, democracy is not the preferred outcome of each actor, but it can result if a powerful actor fails to dominate the others.

This conception of democracy as a last choice can also be seen in Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*.<sup>39</sup> In this milestone political study, Moore described the different paths that various countries have taken to modernity, and put forth social explanations for why some countries took the fascist or communist routes to democracy while

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<sup>39</sup> Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

others were democratic almost from the start. Crucial in these social explanations is the relationship between classes, especially the landed aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, and the peasants. How power over production and resources was distributed among these different groups, and how they struggled for a greater share of this power, constituted the single greatest factor in determining what route to modern democracy each country society would take. Often, this struggle involved the complete elimination of the peasantry, and was almost by necessity violent. Moore emphasized this last point, writing that even if it is unclear whether violent clashes aid or hinder democratization, “it remains necessary to recognize that they were an important part of the whole process.”<sup>40</sup> In his explanation, Moore treated his unit of analysis, the social group, as a rational political actor trying to maximize its relative power. It is only in cases where none of the social groups are able to establish complete dominance over society and its resources that they settle on a democratic form of government. No group wants democracy to begin with, and democracy does not spontaneously spring forth. Rather, it is the system of last resort, and it emerges only after social groups have fought a (usually bloody) struggle to establish dominance.

A more recent application of rational choice theory to the question of democratic consolidation and stability is Adam Przeworski’s *Democracy and the Market*,<sup>41</sup> which frames the problem in terms of game theory. For Przeworski, different systems of government represent sets of rules that each segment of society agrees to recognize. These sets of rules, or “games”, have different payoffs for the social segments based on each group’s natural interests and capacities, and whether democracy or dictatorship is stable depends on the unique circumstances of the times:

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 423.

<sup>41</sup> Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Democracy is consolidated when under given political and economic conditions a particular system of institutions becomes the only game in town, when no one can imagine acting outside the democratic institutions, when all the losers want to do is to try again within the same institutions under which they have just lost.<sup>42</sup>

The best way to understand why some democratic transitions are successful and others fail is not by identifying a society's values and attitudes toward government, but rather by looking at the particular interests of the "players" involved—the bourgeoisie, the military, the aristocracy, and so on.

Democracy will be the preferred game if the interests of all the players are most likely to be best served under that system. If there is a greater probability that one or more players will do well under some other system, and if they have the power to bring that other system into being, then democracy will not be stable:

Hence, the minimal chance required to stay within the democratic system depends on the value of losing in the democratic interplay of interests. Those political forces that have an outside option—the option of subverting democracy or provoking others to subvert it—may stay with the democratic game if they believe that even losing repeatedly under democracy is better for them than a future under an alternative system.<sup>43</sup>

An example Przeworski gave in his book of a case where the value of losing under democracy outweighs the value of winning under another system—such as dominating society in a dictatorial regime—is where the players believe the economy will do better with a democratic government. These groups "opt for this [democratic] system even if they see little chance of winning conflicts about distribution" because they see a high probability of becoming wealthier regardless of how resources are divided. Where democracy is unstable is when groups do not see such a chance of doing well, and have resources and strategies to overthrow the government. The most dangerous strategies are those that "(1) seek to alter ex post the outcomes of the democratic process and (2) drastically reduce the confidence of other actors in democratic

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 31.

institutions. Thus, not to comply is the same as to subvert the democratic system in order to override its outcomes.”<sup>44</sup>

A theory about democratic stability that dovetails with that of Przeworski is Lipset’s proposition that incorporating the elites of the *ancien régime* into the new political order is crucial for ensuring its success.<sup>45</sup> “The old dominating strata” often possess the resources necessary to oppose democratization, and are likely to strongly resent the loss of their supremacy. If the old elites have reason to fear reprisals or drastic redistribution following a complete loss of political power, then they will rally their resources to sabotage as best they can the democratic process. For this reason, in those “countries where monarchy was overthrown by revolution, and orderly succession was broken, forces aligned with the throne have sometimes continued to refuse legitimacy to republican successors down to the fifth generation or more.”<sup>46</sup> In contrast to such countries, Lipset points out that at the time of his writing ten out of the twelve stable European and English-speaking democracies retained the loyalty of the “aristocratic, traditionalist, and clerical sectors of the population” by preserving the monarchy.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the almost absurd fact that many of the world’s most stable democracies still have a monarch is explained by the need to co-opt old elites in order to ensure their loyalty to the new democratic order.

Another theory of democracy that is based on rationalist assumptions is consociationalism. Geared specifically toward those cases where a society is deeply divided between different segments of the population, consociationalism can be thought of as a way to solve the collective action problem of forming a democratic system. The term “consociational

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>45</sup> See Lipset, *Political Man*, 66-67.

<sup>46</sup> Lipset, *Political Man*, 67.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 66.

democracy” was first given substance by Arend Lijphart in his 1969 article by the same name.<sup>48</sup> In instances of extremely fragmented societies with high mutual tension, consociational theory predicts that democracy will best survive if political elites “make *deliberate efforts to counteract the immobilizing and unstabilizing effects of culture fragmentation.*”<sup>49</sup> While there are many ways to accomplish this task, all are similar in that they constitute a “cartel of elites” in which the leaders of the opposing “subcultures” agree to a political structure in which they are all guaranteed a share of power.<sup>50</sup> An example Lijphart gave was Lebanon, in which Maronites held the Presidency of the Republic while Sunnis held the Presidency of the Council.

Lijphart wrote that such arrangements will be successful only if the elites know the consequences of intrastate fighting and are dedicated to preventing it. Their ability to maintain a consociational democracy is improved where there are multiple subcultures, few major issues for the government to deal with, public support for the arrangement, and when the arrangement has already been in place for some time. Consociational democracy is also more stable if the society’s subcultures are internally homogeneous and separated from other groups so as to avoid tensions. While consociationalism can take different forms depending on the circumstances, its general principles are based on rational choice assumptions—the elites of subgroups within a society choose to participate in power-sharing arrangements, or elite cartels, because doing so ensures their interests outweighs the costs of intrastate fighting.

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<sup>48</sup> Arend Lijphart, “Consociational Democracy,” *World Politics* 21, no. 2 (January 1969): 207-225.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 212. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.



## **2. DEMOCRATIC UNIVERSALISM IN THE U.S. FOREIGN POLICY DEBATE**

The foreign policy of the Bush administration, especially in regard to the invasion and occupation of Iraq, has been dominated by the democratic universalist outlook. Evidence of the prevalence of this perspective—besides the dedication of extensive resources to the task of building democracy in Iraq—is found in the president’s proclamation of a “forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East.”<sup>1</sup> In his November 6, 2003 speech commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, President Bush outlined this new strategy and declared his belief in the viability of democratic reform in the Middle East:

In many nations of the Middle East—countries of great strategic importance—democracy has not yet taken root. And the questions arise: Are the peoples of the Middle East somehow beyond the reach of liberty? Are millions of men and women and children condemned by history or culture to live in despotism? Are they alone never to know freedom, and never even to have a choice in the matter? I, for one, do not believe it. I believe every person has the ability and the right to be free.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to this clear affirmation of the democratic universalist line, the president also expressed his confidence in the ability of the United States to foster change: “The success of freedom is not determined by some dialectic of history. By definition, the success of freedom rests upon the choices and the courage of free peoples, and upon their willingness to sacrifice.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, the dedication of the United States and Western democracies to promoting democracy is the key factor deciding whether people around the world live in freedom or under tyranny. This speech, which represented the president’s commitment to supporting and exporting democracy, indicated a dramatic shift from his rhetoric during the 2000 presidential campaign, when he promised a “humble foreign policy” that would avoid nation-building.

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<sup>1</sup> George W. Bush (Remarks at the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, Chamber of Commerce, Washington, DC, November 6, 2003), available at “President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and the Middle East,” The White House, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

This democratic universalist policy can be traced to the political ideology of several members of the president's foreign policy team during his first term who were members of what is often called the neoconservative faction of the American right. They saw in the shocking terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 a dire threat to American security and an opportunity to fulfill the neoconservative vision of eliminating future menaces by transforming the world order, especially the "sclerotic" power structures of the Middle East. Since that time, they have pushed for the pursuit of "benevolent global hegemony" through a "heroic" and muscular foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> William Kristol, one of the most vocal proponents of this vision and a leader of the neoconservative foreign policy school, once claimed President Bush as one of his own:

Bush has broken from the mainstream of his party and become a neoconservative in the true meaning of the term. For if there is a single principle that today divides neoconservatism from traditional American conservatism, it is the conviction that the promotion of liberal democracy abroad is both a moral imperative and a profound national interest.<sup>5</sup>

Such an assertive United States, which many would label imperialist, would protect the homeland against threats and ensure stability in the international system by replacing authoritarian rulers with friendly democracies.

Central to this vision is the universalist assumption that democracy can take root almost anywhere, regardless of economic and social conditions. Oppressed societies need only be liberated, with the help of the United States, and they will naturally move towards democratic governance—either sooner or later. Without such "easy" democracy, the neoconservative goal of toppling dictators and replacing them with pro-Western governments would become too

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<sup>4</sup> See William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 4 (July/August 1996): 18-32; Charles Krauthammer, "Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World" (2004 Irving Kristol lecture at the American Enterprise Institute Annual Dinner, Washington, DC, February 10, 2003), available at [http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.19912,filter.all/pub\\_detail.asp](http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.19912,filter.all/pub_detail.asp).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Kagan and William Kristol, "An Administration of One," *The Weekly Standard*, December 1, 2003, 7.

cumbersome a task for even the American superpower. The neoconservative vision, with its democratic universalist assumptions, took on a new prominence in the wake of September 11 and culminated in the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Examining the ideas of certain key members of the Bush administration's foreign policy team—namely, Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle—as well as other significant universalists outside of government—William Kristol, Robert Kagan, Charles Krauthammer, and Kenneth Pollack—will be helpful for understanding the contribution of the universalist perspective to the debate over democracy in Iraq. It was through these central opinion leaders that the universalist strand of thought grew to prominence both within and without the government.

We turn first to the opinion leaders outside of government, specifically William Kristol, founder and editor of the neoconservative magazine *The Weekly Standard*, and Robert Kagan, a *Washington Post* columnist and contributing editor to *The Weekly Standard*. Both men have held positions in government, with Kristol serving as chief of staff to Vice President Dan Quayle and Kagan serving in the State Department during the Reagan Administration. Through their articles in *The Weekly Standard* and in other publications, such as their seminal 1996 *Foreign Affairs* piece, Kristol and Kagan have established themselves as leading members of the neoconservative foreign policy community and as steadfast democratic universalists. They were staunch advocates for invading Iraq and removing Saddam Hussein from power, and have since been equally staunch advocates for establishing a liberal Iraqi democracy.

More than most commentators, Kristol and Kagan have vigorously insisted that democracy is possible for all people, and that the task of bringing democracy to other lands is well within the capabilities of the United States. In the introduction to their 2000 book *Present Dangers*, they pointed to the third wave of democracy as evidence that democracy is within the

reach of oppressed peoples.<sup>6</sup> Taking aim at “realists” who argue against an idealistic foreign policy, they asked, “With democratic change sweeping the world at an unprecedented rate over these last thirty years, is it ‘realistic’ to insist that no further victories can be won?”<sup>7</sup> The way to win such victories, according to them, was to liberate oppressed populations and hand over sovereignty to them as soon as possible.

Following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Kristol and Kagan argued fervently for the United States to allow elections as early as possible. The initial U.S. plan was for regional caucuses to choose a provisional Iraqi legislature in 2004, followed by a general election the next year. Kristol and Kagan did not agree, writing in 2004 that “[a]mong the biggest mistakes made by the Bush administration over the past year has been the failure to move Iraq more rapidly toward elections.”<sup>8</sup> The key to establishing a democracy therefore lies not in inculcating certain values or fostering higher economic growth, but rather in simply giving the people the power to govern themselves—to use the popular metaphor, democracy needs no fertilizer to take root. This is not to say that Kristol and Kagan expected elections to lead necessarily to a fully developed democracy. Indeed, they acknowledged that pushing for early elections “would make for a hasty and imperfect election process and that much could go wrong.”<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, they maintained that even a flawed election “would contribute to a sense of political progress.”

In the wake of the Iraqi elections to choose a transitional legislature on January 30, 2005, Kristol and Kagan explicitly rejected the idea that society must be somehow prepared for democracy:

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Kagan and William Kristol, “Introduction: National Interest and Global Responsibility,” in *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy*, edited by Robert Kagan and William Kristol (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), 3-24.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Kagan and William Kristol, “Democracy Now,” *The Weekly Standard*, May 17, 2004, 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

How can anyone living in this flourishing democracy tell the people of Iraq that they should not vote for their own leaders, that they are not “ready?” President Bush is sometimes accused of arrogance, but the true and appalling arrogance consists of telling the Iraqi people that they are not capable of electing the right kind of people.<sup>10</sup>

After the Iraqi general election the following December, Kristol and Kagan pointed to the massive turnout of Sunnis, who had widely abstained from voting in the January and October elections, as evidence that all people will choose to participate in democratic governance if given the chance. They seized on reports that threats from Sunni insurgent groups had kept Sunni voters home before, and that assurances of improved security allowed Sunnis to express their true preference for democracy. “The participation of the Sunnis in such high numbers by itself marks this election as a watershed. Either something dramatic has happened to Sunni attitudes, or true Sunni feelings were previously suppressed.”<sup>11</sup> Given their adamant faith in the universal desire for democracy, it is not hard to believe that the authors leaned towards the latter explanation.

Another very influential figure outside of government is journalist and essayist Charles Krauthammer, whose columns in *The Washington Post* and contributions to *The Weekly Standard*, *Time*, and *The National Interest* have a major impact on intellectual debates over U.S. foreign policy. Especially significant in the discourse on U.S. power and hegemony in the international system, and by extension the exportation of democracy, is a speech Krauthammer gave at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) entitled “Democratic Idealism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World.”<sup>12</sup> Though Krauthammer refuses the title of neoconservative that William Kristol and Robert Kagan proudly bear, he shares their belief in the

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Kagan and William Kristol, “A Realigning Election,” *The Weekly Standard*, February 14, 2005, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Kagan and William Kristol, “Happy Days,” *The Weekly Standard*, December 26, 2005, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Krauthammer, “Democratic Realism,” (footnote 4).

universality of democratic aspirations and values—a belief that is also shared by the Bush administration. As Francis Fukuyama once noted:

Krauthammer is a gifted thinker and his ideas are worth taking seriously for their own sake. But, perhaps more importantly, his strategic thinking has become emblematic of a school of thought that has acquired strong influence inside the Bush Administration foreign policy team and beyond. It is for this reason that Krauthammer’s writings, particularly his AEI speech, require careful analysis.<sup>13</sup>

In his speech Krauthammer proposed a foreign policy of idealism tempered by a sober analysis of strategic national interest—in other words, a combination of idealism and realism. The United States should seek to spread its democratic principles, but not just anywhere. “The danger of democratic globalism is its universalism, its open-ended commitment to human freedom, its temptation to plant the flag of democracy everywhere. It must learn to say no.”<sup>14</sup> The answer to the questions of “Where to intervene? Where to bring democracy?” and “Where to nation-build?” is simply “where it counts” to U.S. economic, strategic, and national security interests.

While at various points in his speech Krauthammer acknowledged the potential difficulties that could arise from such a policy of regime-change and building democracy abroad—and even allowed that such a policy may fail—his criterion of “where it counts” belies his apparent caution. His condition is not “where we can” or “where it is possible,” but rather where it is worth it to us. The ability of the United States to build democracy and the capacity of other countries to self-govern are not part of the question, implying that the United States can indeed “plant the flag of democracy” wherever and whenever it chooses. Similarly, in a later article defending the ideas put forth in his speech, Krauthammer pointed to American will as the deciding factor in the success or failure of democratization. In the past, he said, “America was pursuing democratization in Europe, East Asia, South and Central America—everywhere except

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<sup>13</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “The Neoconservative Moment,” *The National Interest* 76 (Summer 2004): 58.

<sup>14</sup> Krauthammer, “Democratic Realism.”

the Arab world. Democratization elsewhere was remarkably successful and was the key to stability and pacification.”<sup>15</sup> Again, Krauthammer did not doubt the ability of the United States to foster liberal democracy abroad—it is a matter only of choosing where to focus our energies.

The region most in need of democracy, according to Krauthammer, was the Middle East. Its vast oil reserves as well as its troubles with Islamic radicalism and authoritarian rule made it a vital region to U.S. interests. To address criticisms of his ambitious proposal to bring freedom to a region with such a poor track record of democracy, he pointed to similar opposition to democratization in the past:

Realists have been warning against the hubris of thinking we can transform an alien culture because of some postulated natural and universal human will to freedom. And they may yet be right. But how do they know in advance? Half a century ago, we heard the same confident warnings about the imperviousness to democracy of Confucian culture. That proved stunningly wrong. Where is it written that Arabs are incapable of democracy?<sup>16</sup>

In his commentary before the war, Krauthammer swept away questions of culture, arguing instead that it is a universal human value to want self-governance in the form of liberal democracy. With his speech at AEI and his subsequent defense of his vision, Krauthammer helped lead the charge for democratic universalists in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq and during the occupation.

Though not as fervent as Krauthammer and Kristol and Kagan in expounding a vision of U.S. hegemony and democratic globalism, scholar Kenneth Pollack nevertheless supported in a major way the universalist contribution to the debate over Iraq. His book *The Threatening Storm*, which made a comprehensive case for the removal of Saddam Hussein, was cited frequently by commentators and policymakers alike as an authoritative account of why the United States should replace the Iraqi dictator with a pro-Western democracy. He, like

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Krauthammer, “In Defense of Democratic Realism,” *The National Interest* 77 (Fall 2004): 23.

<sup>16</sup> Krauthammer, “Democratic Realism.”

Krauthammer, looked to the dramatic increase in the number of democracies in the last thirty years as proof that democracy does not necessarily require certain preconditions. He wrote, “[t]here are countless countries around the world today that had no democratic tradition in the past but within the last twenty years have developed into functioning democracies,” despite the naysayers who “claimed that this country or that was culturally, psychologically, or even racially unsuited to democracy.”<sup>17</sup> Because other countries have defied such condemnation to authoritarian rule, Pollack believed that Iraq could do so as well, though he was mindful in his book to recognize that other countries have not had an easy time with it.

A further indication of Pollack’s universalist beliefs was his recommendation to purge Iraq of its former government officials and administrators. He wrote:

[T]he United States and United Nations must focus on constructing brand-new Iraqi political institutions and bringing new people into government. The old institutions and most of the officials would probably be tainted by the regime, and relying on them would inevitably mean a creeping return to old, corrupt practices and inefficient notions of administration.<sup>18</sup>

What was implied in this suggestion was that members of the old regime were an aberration, while most of the Iraqis who were not directly involved in the country’s governance would be free of the way of thinking that leads to totalitarian rule. In other words, Pollack assumed that Iraqi society, minus the regime’s members, had not been “tainted” by the regime—Iraqis still valued democratic principles even after decades of tyranny. His was a position that stands in decided opposition to the notion that a people’s culture can be changed by the experience of oppression such that they no longer value the principles that are necessary for democracy to survive.

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<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Pollack, *The Threatening Storm* (New York: Random House, 2002), 400.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 407.



Another scholar who has had a significant impact on the debate over Iraqi democracy, as well as on actual policy on the ground, is Brendan O’Leary, who served as a constitutional advisor to the Kurdistan National Assembly and Government. From January to June of 2004 he advised the Kurds on federal and electoral issues, and in 2005 he advised them on the drafting of Iraq’s permanent constitution. In his recent writings about Kurdistan and the question of Iraqi democracy, O’Leary focuses almost all his energies on the details of constitutional design. For him, the biggest questions are not whether Iraqi political culture or economic development are conducive to democracy—though, as we will see in later chapters, he does consider these factors. Rather, his concern lies with the proper construction of a constitution—centralization versus decentralization, majoritarian versus consensual, national versus multinational. He sees the greatest hope for Iraq in a federal system that acknowledges the different ethnic and religious groups of the country, and contains the “full repertoire of liberal democratic institutions, universal adult suffrage, competitive elections, freedom for political parties and interest groups, the rule of law, human rights protections, and a free media.”<sup>19</sup> Apparently, for him, securing these elements of democracy is a matter of writing them into the constitution. There is very little discussion of whether or not Iraqis will accept such things as “freedom for political parties” and “human rights protections” in light of their authoritarian past. This suggests that O’Leary assumes such democratic values and attributes are universally applicable, and that he believes they need only be guaranteed in a well-written document signed by the relevant political groups in order for them to hold true in Iraqi society.

A further indication of democratic universalist assumptions in O’Leary’s writing is the fact that he attributes much of the difficulties in Iraq to mismanagement of the occupation and

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<sup>19</sup> Brendan O’Leary, “Power-Sharing, Pluralist Federation, and Federacy,” in *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq*, edited by Brendan O’Leary et al. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 70.

reconstruction effort: “The Pentagon’s forte is not state-building, and its senior officials behaved arrogantly, learning little from U.S. interventions in the 1990s. At best they largely prepared for contingencies that did not happen—the impact of WMDs and large-scale refugee movements.”<sup>20</sup> This poor planning led to the “Hobbesian problem of disorder” that resulted from the widespread looting and criminality of the post-invasion period. Further instances of incompetence, like allowing the Iraqi state to implode, led to the emergence of the Sunni insurgency and the continuing spiral of violence we see today. By placing ultimate blame for Iraq’s problems on bad management, and by saying that the United States could have done better by pursuing a more effective counterinsurgency strategy and fostering goodwill among Iraq’s ethnic groups, O’Leary implies that the original goal of democratizing Iraq was sound. In other words, the idea that the United States could plant democracy in such a seemingly hostile place is not challenged, which implies the assumption that democracy is universally desired and sustainable.

One last influential opinion leader outside the Bush administration who has exhibited elements of the universalist strand of argument is Larry Diamond. Even though he is closely associated with the school of thought that emphasizes political culture—as we shall see in a fuller treatment of his ideas in the next chapter—Diamond has occasionally conveyed a belief in the universal capacity for all people to sustain a democracy. In 2004, he wrote:

After 25 years of weighing the evidence and studying democratic development in more than two dozen countries, I have concluded that there in fact are no preconditions for democracy other than a commitment by political elites to implement it (and, one hopes, broad popular support as well).<sup>21</sup>

He also argued that scores of the third wave democracies—many of which “had no ‘tradition of limited or responsible government,’ ‘no middle class to speak of independent from the state,’ no

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<sup>20</sup> Brendan O’Leary, “Vistas of Exits from Baghdad,” in *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 290.

<sup>21</sup> Tony Smith and Larry Diamond, “Was Iraq a Fool’s Errand?” *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 6 (November/December 2004): 132.

strong unifying national identity, and no Nelson Mandela”—have defied expectations and managed to sustain at least somewhat liberal democratic governance. While universalist argument is by far not dominant in Diamond’s writings, its occurrence in the arguments of such a noted political culture theorist is testament to its prevalence in the present day U.S. foreign policy establishment.

We turn now to a look at the democratic universalist thinkers who actually formed and executed policy for Iraq, keeping in mind that their ideas may well have been influenced by actors outside of government. While the number of people who were directly or indirectly involved in the Bush Administration’s policy process is far too large to give a complete treatment in this study, it is possible to focus on those men who set the agenda and whose ideology served as the impetus for the effort to bring democracy to Iraq—Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle.

Paul Wolfowitz was the highest-ranking neoconservative in the civilian Pentagon leadership. As Deputy Secretary of Defense from 2000-2005, he was one of the main advocates for going to war in Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein and establish a democracy. Curiously, though, in a contribution to a book edited by William Kristol and Robert Kagan, Wolfowitz expressed doubt in 2000 that the United States could plant democracy wherever it wanted:

Promoting democracy requires attention to specific circumstances and to the limitations of U.S. leverage. Both because of what the United States is, and because of what is possible, we cannot engage either in promoting democracy or in nation-building as an exercise of will. We must proceed by interaction and indirection, not imposition.<sup>22</sup>

Even with the United States’ enormous preponderance of military power, Wolfowitz urged restraint and caution because of his qualms over how much any outside actor can directly foster

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Wolfowitz, “Statesmanship in the New Century,” in *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy*, edited by Robert Kagan and William Kristol (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 200), 320-321.

democracy. In the same article, he spoke of the failure of the United States mission to establish a democratic government in Haiti. Given the country's economic inequalities and the lack of elite commitment to democratic principles, he said "it is no surprise that the use of the American military to build democracy there has been an expensive failure."<sup>23</sup> He added further that "we seem to have forgotten what Vietnam should have taught us about the limitations of the military as an instrument of 'nation-building.'"<sup>24</sup>

In contrast to his earlier doubts over the ability of the United States to impose democracy, Wolfowitz was steadfast during his tenure as Deputy Secretary of Defense in his insistence that all people value self-governance, that democracy was possible in Iraq, and that the U.S. would be able to help plant it there. For example, in a February 2003 speech to a group of Iraqi-Americans in Dearborn, Michigan, Wolfowitz said, "the values of freedom and democracy are not just Western values or European values, they are Muslim and Asian values as well. Indeed, they are universal values. They are the bridge that span civilizations."<sup>25</sup> He also said that after decades of oppression, the Iraqi people were "yearning for representative government" and that "more than any other people, they have been inoculated against tyranny."<sup>26</sup> In a later interview on National Public Radio, he invoked the now familiar argument that 15 or 20 years ago no one would have believed that a place like South Korea could blossom into a democracy, and so therefore we should not doubt the ability of Iraq or other Arabs states to do the same.<sup>27</sup>

Wolfowitz' comments in 2000 appear to clash with his more recent rhetoric and policy. While this disconnect can be explained as a shift in ideas, it can also be argued that his support

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 319.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Wolfowitz (Remarks at town Hall Meeting with Iraqi-American Community, Dearborn, MI, February 23, 2003), available at "Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz Town Hall Meeting with Iraqi-American Community," U.S. Department of Defense, <http://www.defenselink.mil/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=1952>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Wolfowitz, interview by Juan Williams, *Morning Edition*, NPR, April 7, 2003.

for democracy in Iraq was consistent with his earlier writings. Before, he was arguing against the United States trying to promote democracy widely, preferring instead an approach that takes account of what is possible in light of U.S. limitations and local conditions. Since this implies that certain places are better suited than others for democracy, it is possible that Wolfowitz thought that Iraq met his criteria for democratization, while Haiti did not. This in turn explains why Wolfowitz rallied for years for Saddam's ouster while at the same time disparaging efforts to end authoritarian rule in other places. Furthermore, it can be argued that Wolfowitz did not see or plan for the United States to militarily impose democracy on Iraq. Indeed, it was a common belief in the Pentagon and the White House that the United States would only need to remove Saddam from power, and that the Iraqi people and the international community would do much of the rest of the job of democratization. If it is true that Wolfowitz' support for fostering democracy in Iraq was based on the same convictions as his earlier writings, then it does not bode well for the neoconservative vision, which seeks to spread democracy far and wide regardless of local circumstances.

Though he did not hold an official position in the Bush Administration, Richard Perle can be considered to have been a senior policymaker in the years leading up to the war in Iraq. As chairman of the Defense Policy Board, he exerted significant pressure in the shaping of Iraq policy, earning his label as one of the "architects" of the war. While he has repeatedly denied that the invasion was intended to spread liberal democracy rather than to simply disarm Saddam Hussein,<sup>28</sup> he has commented several times on the ability of the United States to accomplish the former task. In a February 2003 interview, Perle called Iraq "a very good candidate for

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<sup>28</sup> See Richard Perle, interview by Andrea Seabrook, *Weekend Edition*, NPR, November 12, 2006.

democratic reform,” and said that while “[i]t won’t be Westminster overnight” he believed that “[t]he Iraqis have a decent chance of succeeding.”<sup>29</sup>

In a book co-authored with former White House speechwriter David Frum, Perle and Frum explained what they thought was needed for democracy to take root:

We can offer advice. We can help them take steps toward a free market system to replace Saddam’s kleptocratic command economy. We can train Iraqi soldiers to combat insurgencies while respecting human rights, as we have trained armies in the Philippines and Latin America. We did not come to Iraq to govern it. We came to Iraq to restore the *self-government* stolen from it by decades of tyranny.<sup>30</sup>

In this minimalist version of the U.S. role in rebuilding Iraq, the Iraqis have always been capable of governing democratically, and that apart from removing Saddam Hussein there is not much else the United States can or should do. Democracy is the default position, and all that is needed is to reset the clock, so to speak. Additionally, Perle and Frum argue that “[i]f a foreign people lack liberty, it is not because of some misguided act of cultural choice. It is because they have been seized and oppressed and tyrannized.”<sup>31</sup> Like Krauthammer, Kristol and Kagan, and Wolfowitz, Perle and Frum discount the notion that culture can be an obstacle to self-rule, as is made clear when they observe, “To say that we are engaged in ‘imposing American values’ when we liberate people is to imply that there are peoples on this earth who value their own subjugation.”<sup>32</sup>

While Perle and Frum contend that Iraqis—like all people—are naturally disposed to self-governance, they caution against holding elections immediately. Rather, they say democratization entails “opening political spaces in which Middle Eastern people can express concrete grievances,” “creating representative institutions that protect minorities and women,”

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<sup>29</sup> David Rose, “Neo Culpa” *Vanity Fair*, January 2007, 82.

<sup>30</sup> David Frum and Richard Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* (New York: Random House, 2003), 165.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

deregulating the economy,” and “establishing schools that prepare young people for the world of today.”<sup>33</sup> By this they do not imply that oppressed societies like Iraq are not ready for democracy, but that democracy means much more than elections. The role that the United States is to play in this process, other than offering advice and training soldiers, is to help promote economic growth and to help set up constitutional government. Even if “people all over the world want the benefits of American democracy,” they lack “the skills to launch a representative government by only their unaided strength.”<sup>34</sup> The logical conclusion of such thinking is that once the mission of liberation is accomplished, the United States should hand sovereignty over to the newly freed people and leave.

Perle did expect the United States to quickly extricate itself from Iraq, as illustrated in an October 2006 interview in which he said he believes “we made some very serious mistakes early on in slipping into an occupation, rather than turning things over to the Iraqis more or less immediately.”<sup>35</sup> Curiously, however, Perle’s idea of “turning things over to the Iraqis” involved giving power to the Iraqi National Congress (INC), an exile group led by a man, Ahmad Chalabi, who had not been in Iraq in decades. The reasoning behind this idea—an idea, according to Perle and Frum, shared by many who had pushed for the invasion—was to follow the example of the Allies in World War II, who allowed the French resistance to aid in the invasion of France and form the provisional government. Of course, this ignores the fact that in many instances members of the INC had been outside of the country for decades, whereas French resistance leaders were absent only a few years. In the book with Frum, the two wrote that following Saddam’s fall, “[o]ur choice was either to work with Chalabi or to rule Iraq ourselves—and

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 272.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Perle, interview by Neal Conan, *Talk of the Nation*, NPR, October 24, 2006.

unfortunately we backed ourselves into that second alternative.”<sup>36</sup> Oddly, while Perle and Frum speak of Iraqis being naturally able to govern themselves once Saddam’s grip is removed, the two are unwilling to trust Iraqis within the country with establishing a democracy. This implies some notion that Iraqis who have been living under tyrannical rule for too long may not in fact be ready for democracy, signaling that Perle and Frum may also harbor some beliefs that correlate with the sociological school, to which we now turn.

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<sup>36</sup> Perle and Frum, *An End to Evil*, 165-166.



### **3. THE SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH IN THE U.S. FOREIGN POLICY DEBATE**

Within the present U.S. foreign policy establishment, one of the more prevalent strains of thought regarding the building of democracy abroad falls most fittingly under the rubric of the sociological school. Regardless of whether foreign policy elites make the case for or against the prospect of the United States planting liberal democracies throughout the globe, they often utilize arguments about political culture to support their theses. The following section will examine this strand of argument among five opinion leaders who have been influential in the debate about Iraq: Larry Diamond, Charles Krauthammer, Kenneth Pollack, Francis Fukuyama, and Henry Kissinger. In addition to demonstrating how each of these figures adheres to sociological reasoning, this chapter will also reveal how their ideas about political culture affect their beliefs concerning the ability of the United States to foster democracy abroad.

In the forum of U.S. foreign policy elites, Larry Diamond is one of the most influential and representative members of the sociological school. A senior fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution, co-editor of the *Journal of Democracy*, and co-director of the National Endowment for Democracy's International Forum for Democratic Studies, Diamond has advised the U.S. government frequently on matters concerning the development of liberal political systems in other countries. From January until April of 2004 he served as a senior advisor to the Coalition Provisional Administration (CPA) in Baghdad, working at the forefront of the U.S. effort to establish democratic governance in Iraq. Because of his tenure at the CPA and his many writings on the subject, Diamond's ideas have a far reach within U.S. foreign policy circles. While it is readily evident that Diamond is an intellectual descendant of such thinkers as Almond and Lipset—he is the editor of a book about political culture dedicated to Gabriel Almond—it is

nevertheless worthwhile to consider exactly what he believes about the relationship between political culture and building democracy, and how he applies those ideas to the case of Iraq.

Diamond's thoughts on the relationship of political culture to democracy were most completely revealed and articulated in the introduction to his book *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries*.<sup>1</sup> He maintained in that piece that "political culture does matter to democracy, independently of other variables, and that the development of a democratic culture cannot be taken for granted as a natural by-product of democratic practice or institutional design."<sup>2</sup> He also closely followed the sociological school's tenet that a democratic regime must be seen as "legitimate" in order to be stable. By "legitimate" it is meant that the regime's structure accords with the values and beliefs of the people or elites. True to Lipset's thesis on the subject, Diamond contended that for a democracy to be stable, people should believe, "as a general principle, that democracy is the best form of government possible," and "that in spite of its failures and shortcomings, their own democratic regime is better than any other that might be established for their country."<sup>3</sup> It is not clear from the text whether or not Diamond took such beliefs to be absolutely necessary for stable democracy—which he only vaguely defined as approaching the "perfect ideal" of democracy. But by saying "should," he seemed to suggest that they are simply more conducive to it.

Still, while he believed that a country's particular political culture is the most important variable for understanding its likelihood of becoming a democracy, he conceded that it may not be the only factor to be taken into account. For example, he pointed out that "social and economic change, social and civic mobilization, institutional practice, historical experience, and

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<sup>1</sup> Larry Diamond, "Political Culture and Democracy," in *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries*, edited by Larry Diamond (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), 1-33.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

international diffusion can all modify or gradually transform the predominant political values, beliefs, and attitudes of a country.”<sup>4</sup> One factor he mentioned that is worth highlighting is the habitual practice of democracy. While he rejected the notion that habituation and institution building is the only variable necessary for an understanding of the relationship of political culture to democracy, he did acknowledge its great importance due to the fact that “institutions heavily shape choices and behavior, and that the ‘habitual’ practice of those choices and behaviors may eventually become embedded in intrinsic cultural values and norms.”<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, he insisted that culture is not a “by-product” of habit.

Though Diamond’s beliefs, as presented in *Political Culture*, strongly correlated with the classic theorists, namely Almond and Verba and Lipset, he did deviate from them in important ways. The most important difference was that his story of democratization featured different main actors:

With the exception of a commitment among political elites to the legitimacy of democracy and its procedural norms—which may be, initially, quite instrumental and contingent—none of the above elements of political culture [cooperativeness, commitment to the system, trust, etc.] seems necessary for the establishment of democracy. Most of them, indeed, appear to be more important among the elite, especially early on.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to Almond and Verba, whose study examined the attitudes and values of the general public in multiple countries, Diamond placed emphasis on the upper echelons of society. The condition of the masses, especially their socioeconomic predicament, was far less important to him. This elite-centered outlook has significant implications for how he would suggest an outside power best promote democracy—the most logical conclusion would be to focus on

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 15.

molding the values of the elite, and let the masses follow. To see how Diamond applied his convictions to a real world case, we now turn to his role in bringing democracy to Iraq.

At the time of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Diamond penned an article in the Hoover Institution's quarterly publication in which he laid out his suggestions for how to proceed with the transition from Saddam Hussein's totalitarian Baathist regime to a liberal democracy.<sup>7</sup> His plan for Iraq was one that sought to sweep away all remnants of the old regime and build a new democratic order in its place. To do this, he wrote, the U.S. would have to foster a "culture of legality and democracy," which itself would be accomplished by the:

[E]nergetic deployment of international (and whenever possible, Arab) legal experts, judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and educators to train and construct a new Iraqi legal system and to enlist Iraqis in the vital task of public education on human rights and the rule of law.<sup>8</sup>

The goal was to create a system of government based on the rule of law and to simultaneously instill in the Iraqi population the corresponding democratic values necessary for self-governance. Loud echoes of Almond and Verba's participant political culture and congruence can be heard in Diamond's calls for a democratic Iraq.

In an article published after his time in Iraq, Diamond reaffirmed his commitment to the political culture perspective.<sup>9</sup> In it he decried the U.S.'s increasingly disastrous effort to rebuild Iraq and echoed his earlier proposal when he called for "social reconstruction, including the renewal (or in some cases, creation) of a civil society and political culture that foster voluntary cooperation and the limitation of state power." He also repeated Lipset's argument about the importance of legitimacy and effectiveness when he spoke of the fledgling Iraqi government,

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<sup>7</sup> Larry Diamond, "Can Iraq Become a Democracy?" *Hoover Digest* 2 (Spring 2003), <<http://www.hooverdigest.org/032/diamond.html>>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Larry Diamond, "What Went Wrong in Iraq?" *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 5 (September/October 2004): 34-56.

warning that “without demonstrable progress on the economic front, a new government cannot develop or sustain legitimacy, and its effectiveness will quickly wane.”<sup>10</sup>

In his most recent book, *Squandered Victory*,<sup>11</sup> Diamond appears to have shifted to a slightly different angle of the political culture viewpoint. In response to the ever more deteriorating situation in Iraq, he downplays his ambitious plans for reconstructing Iraq’s society and fostering a democratic civic culture. While not abandoning these lofty goals, he advocates a more gradual approach. For example, in an episode in which he relates a meeting with a group of Iraqi students, Diamond reveals a fresh awareness of the amount of time it will take to build a democratic society:

“How do we make people feel free after thirty years of dictatorship?” one student asked. I conceded that I didn’t know the answer; the shift in perception would happen only gradually and through the practice of democracy, not just the spreading of ideas.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, the building of democratic political institutions combined with a habituation to democratic procedures would eventually make the political consciousness of Iraqi society conform to the mold of democracy—a claim that stands in stark contrast to his earlier assertion that a democratic culture is not the mere by-product of habit and practice, and that such factors only affect culture at the margins. This new outlook signals a shift to another variation of the sociological approach known as gradualism.

Another variation of the political culture approach evident in Diamond’s writings is the traditionalist vein. When discussing the importance of legitimacy and effectiveness to democratic regimes in “Political Culture and Democracy,” he said that legitimacy “derives partly from the performance over time of the democratic regime, but it is also influenced (especially in

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 107.

the early life of the regime) by how specific democratic institutions articulate with traditionally legitimate forms of authority.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, in order to establish a democratic regime that is widely supported—either among the elite or the masses—it is best to utilize familiar and respected institutions of power. An example would be the meeting of the loya jirga, or tribal council, in Afghanistan following the allied invasion to topple the Taliban.<sup>14</sup> Traditionally used to settle tribal disputes, the 2002 loya jirga met as a constitutional convention to create a new Afghan democratic government. In Iraq, the goal would be to find similar democratic or quasi-democratic institutions as a starting point for establishing “legitimate” power structures. This emphasis on the need to “graft” new political systems onto traditional power structures reflects Eckstein’s ideas about traditionalism.

In all, while Diamond believes that political culture is the dominant variable determining the viability of democracy, he is not one who considers a country’s particular political culture to be immutable. Rather, he sees it as at least somewhat malleable, opening up the possibility that outside forces can create conditions more favorable for democracy. He does not, however, suggest that the great powers begin toppling regimes at will. In a report to the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, Diamond laid out the criteria he believed a country should meet before the international community attempts to promote democratic reform. These criteria were:

[T]he strategic importance of the country to their [the outside power’s] own security and to regional and global security more broadly; the degree to which democratic assistance is needed; the capacity of indigenous institutions and actors to absorb aid effectively; and

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<sup>13</sup> Diamond, “Political Culture and Democracy,” 13.

<sup>14</sup> For a brief description of the loya jirga and its history, see “Q&A: What is a loya jirga?,” BBC News, July 1, 2002, world edition, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/1782079.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1782079.stm).

the potential of a country to serve as a model, a point of diffusion, a ‘beachhead’ for democratic development (and even a stabilizing anchor) within a region.”<sup>15</sup>

Though Iraq may not have satisfied all these conditions, according to Diamond, they must have satisfied at least the majority of them in order for him to have advocated for its democratization. In the same report, Diamond recommended a mix of political assistance—such as developing political institutions like parties, local governments, legislatures, and the judiciary—civil society assistance, economic assistance like debt rescheduling and welfare programs, and diplomatic pressure. He also saw a role for military intervention in cases “where an overwhelming popular preference for democracy exists and is blocked by a narrow repressive elite (as in Haiti).”<sup>16</sup> Based on Diamond’s claim that “the Iraqi people desperately want” a democratic system, the invasion of Iraq was justified according to this criterion.<sup>17</sup>

Though his aims in his writings before the U.S. invasion were ambitious—establishing democratic norms and practices in the heart of the Middle East—Diamond did warn that the endeavor would be long and difficult. Chief among the challenges he listed was the lack of a democratic tradition in Iraq combined with the country’s location in a “cultural zone—the Arab world—that does not have a single democracy” and is hostile to democratic development.<sup>18</sup> These two factors set the case of Iraq apart from the two most successful post-war democratic reconstructions—Germany and Japan—both of which boasted some sort of democratic traditions. At the time of the invasion, he cautioned that “democracy is not a gift we as Americans can bestow on Iraqis,”<sup>19</sup> and in his book he writes, “Rebuilding the state is typically a slow process that requires an extended transitional period of rule by—or with the extensive

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<sup>15</sup> Larry Diamond, *Promoting Democracy in the 1990s: Actors and Instruments, Issues and Imperatives: A Report to the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict* (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, December 1995), 65.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>17</sup> Smith and Diamond, “Was Iraq a Fool’s Errand?” 133.

<sup>18</sup> Diamond, “Can Iraq Become a Democracy?”

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

support of—the international community.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, Diamond’s understanding of the relationship between political culture and democracy does not preclude him from supporting efforts to build democracy in traditionally very anti-democratic places. Still, he insists that the task of reshaping a society’s political culture is a long and difficult one, and his tenure at the CPA has reaffirmed this conviction.

Brendan O’Leary, like Larry Diamond, has spent considerable time in Iraq as an advisor, in his case serving the Kurdistan National Assembly and the Kurdish government. While his concern lies almost entirely with constitutional design, he has also weighed in on questions of political culture. For example, when referring in his recent book to the question of whether democracy is compatible with Islamic values, he writes, “comparative evidence suggests that there may be an Arab rather than a Muslim problem with democracy—that may owe something to Arab political culture as well as past U.S. foreign policy support for Arab autocracies.”<sup>21</sup> The difference in both historical experience and culture between Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq—the former is relatively free of “absolutist” Islamism, Khomeinism, or wahhabism, and its elites were mostly educated in Europe<sup>22</sup>—suggests that “Kurdistan may find democratization easier than Arab Iraq, a thought that a current sojourn in both locations tends to encourage.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, although O’Leary subscribes to other approaches to understanding democratic origins when discussing questions of Iraqi democracy and stability, he attributes the fact that Kurdistan tends to be more democratic than the rest of the country to differences in culture.

Another influential opinion leader who has subscribed to arguments about political culture is Kenneth Pollack. In *The Threatening Storm*, he argued that “[p]ast efforts at nation

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<sup>20</sup> Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 23.

<sup>21</sup> O’Leary, “Vistas of Exits,” 294.

<sup>22</sup> Brendan O’Leary (remarks at panel discussion at the Eastern Sociological Society, March 17, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> O’Leary, “Vistas of Exits,” 294.



building have generally worked best when they were conducted flexibly,” and that the necessary “distribution of new resources generally works best when it can be tied into local cultural traditions.”<sup>24</sup> This observation was closely in line with the traditionalist approach that Harry Eckstein formulated and Larry Diamond supports. In addition to this, Pollack made the same case as Diamond for the gradual socialization of Iraqis through habit and institutional practice. While discussing the establishment of democratic governing structures, Pollack outlined two approaches. The first, which he dubs the “top-down” approach, featured a constitutional convention shortly after the U.S. invasion, followed by national legislative and executive elections. The second approach was “bottom-up,” starting with local and municipal elections and working up to nationwide elections. He recommended the latter approach because it “would be more stable and would allow the Iraqis to gradually acquire experience with democratic processes before making the most important decisions.”<sup>25</sup> This is the same Eckstein-style argument as that put forth by Larry Diamond when he said a democratic political culture would develop after years of following democratic procedures.

Not all democratic universalists consider political culture to be a flexible determinant of democracy. Charles Krauthammer, who boasts unassailable universalist credentials, has taken a different tack in recent months, leaning towards the belief that political culture can possibly be an incontrovertible obstacle to democracy. In the early days of the occupation, Krauthammer clung adamantly to his vision of a democratic Iraq in the middle of the Arab-Islamic crescent that would serve as a bulwark against the tide of Islamist extremism and totalitarianism. In a 2004 article defending his ideology of “democratic realism,” he dismissed the suggestion that the United States must understand the unique history and culture of a country in order to establish a

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<sup>24</sup> Pollack, *Threatening Storm*, 402.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 407.

democracy.<sup>26</sup> The reason the United States has succeeded in building democracies in some countries—Germany, Japan, and South Korea—while it has failed in others—Haiti, Somalia—is not because of our understanding of the particular cultures, nor is it the result of the status of democratic traditions. Indeed, he claimed that “[i]n Korea, we did not have any great knowledge of the culture nor did Korea have any democratic traditions upon which to draw. Yet South Korea is a remarkable success.”<sup>27</sup> For Krauthammer at that point, the only meaningful variable that explained success or failure in exporting democracy was the will of the United States to “stay the course,” and this determination was found only when a country was of “strategic value” to the United States.

Krauthammer’s confidence in the ability of the United States to install democratic regimes at will has faded since the publication of that article. As the violence in Iraq escalates and the country appears on the verge of being torn apart by sectarian feuds, Krauthammer has tempered his earlier comments about nation building being a matter solely of American might and will. He has also shifted his views on what the independent variables are in the construction of a democracy. Instead of arguing that the limping reconstruction effort is due to lack of support at home, he explains in a recent article that the greatest obstacle is Iraq’s political culture:

True, there are political, historical, even religious reasons why Arabs are less prepared for democracy than, say, East Asians and Latin Americans who successfully democratized over the past several decades. But the problem here is Iraq's particular political culture, raped and ruined by 30 years of Hussein's totalitarianism. What was left in its wake was a social desert, a dearth of the trust and good will and sheer human capital required for democratic governance. All that was left for the individual Iraqi to attach himself to was the mosque or clan or militia. At this earliest stage of democratic development, Iraqi national consciousness is as yet too weak and the culture of compromise too undeveloped

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<sup>26</sup> Charles Krauthammer, “In Defense of Democratic Realism,” *The National Interest* 77 (Fall 2004): 15-25.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

to produce an effective government enjoying broad allegiance.<sup>28</sup>

This emphasis on political culture is a major departure from his earlier insistence that culture is not nearly as important as the will of the United States—an indication that his universalist views have been severely challenged by the experience of Iraq. When Iraqis turned to their tribes or to militias for protection, rather than investing confidence in the new constitution and the national government, and when it became clear that the preferred method of settling disputes was through violence rather than peaceful political competition, Krauthammer must have decided that the political culture of Iraq is inherently unsuitable for democracy. This realization undoubtedly has tempered his earlier hopes for spreading liberal democracy to the Middle East and beyond.

Two other leading figures of the U.S. foreign policy establishment have made similar arguments as Krauthammer about the difficulty of changing a country's political culture. The first is Francis Fukuyama, who has served in the U.S. Department of State and has penned numerous influential works on global politics. The most famous of these is *The End of History and the Last Man*, in which he argued that in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, liberal democracy is the last real remaining option for governance. However, in a 2004 article criticizing Krauthammer's speech before the American Enterprise Institute, Fukuyama clearly stated his stance on the exportation of democracy:

Culture is not destiny, but culture plays an important role in making possible certain kinds of institutions—something that is usually taken to be a conservative insight. Though I, more than most people, am associated with the idea that history's arrow points to democracy, I have never believed that democracies can be created anywhere and everywhere through sheer political will.<sup>29</sup>

He went on to say that with specific regard to Iraq before the invasion, “there were many reasons for thinking that building a democratic Iraq was a task of a complexity that would be nearly

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<sup>28</sup> Charles Krauthammer, “Why Iraq is Crumbling,” *The Washington Post*, A25, November 17, 2006. In Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>29</sup> Fukuyama, “The Neoconservative Moment,” 175.

unmanageable.”<sup>30</sup> Among these reasons he included “the society’s propensity for violence, its tribal structure and the dominance of extended kin and patronage networks.”<sup>31</sup> These qualities are clearly at odds with the features of a democratic civic culture as described by Almond and Verba and Eckstein. Unlike Diamond and Pollack, Fukuyama did not hold much hope for changing Iraq’s culture to be congruent with a democratic form of government.

The second leading foreign policy figure is Henry Kissinger, whose tenures as National Security Adviser to Richard Nixon and Secretary of State under Gerald Ford, as well as his continued involvement since then in foreign affairs, have established him as a sort of dean of the conservative U.S. foreign policy community. In 2004, the ever-pragmatic Kissinger argued that “foreign policy to promote democracy needs to be adapted to local or regional realities, or it will fail. In the pursuit of democracy, policy—as in other realms—is the art of the possible.”<sup>32</sup> What is possible in the business of exporting democracy is determined by the fact that democracy “will thrive only where it reflects cultural, historical, and institutional backgrounds.”<sup>33</sup> Kissinger hastened to add that “[t]o say that democracy has cultural prerequisites does not deny its ultimate applicability to other societies but only takes note of the fact that compressing the evolution of centuries into an inappropriate time frame risks huge unintended consequences.”<sup>34</sup> Even though he allowed that democracy may be exported to some places, he believed that it was folly for the U.S. to attempt to build from scratch in the span of a few years what normally takes centuries. His skepticism of the ability to foster democracy at will can also be seen as a belief that we really do not have an adequate understanding of how democracy comes into being. This is an opinion

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Henry Kissinger, “Intervention with a Vision,” in *The Right War? The Conservative Debate on Iraq*, edited by Gary Rosen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 52.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

shared by many, both within and without academia, and is grounded in the observation that despite many attempts to do so, the world's democracies have not found a way to establish self-sustaining democracies in post-conflict regions around the world.

Because of this recognition of the difficulties facing the United States in Iraq, Kissinger recommended in place of the grand vision for a democratic Iraq a policy that recognized "cultural and historical circumstance." Since Iraq had been under a totalitarian regime for over three decades, he most likely meant that the United States should push the Iraqis gently toward democracy without expecting a liberal, pluralist government to blossom. The likeliest implications of such a realist approach would be the creation of another Arab authoritarian regime, albeit one that is friendly to the United States and perhaps more open to democratic progress. While this is hardly the idealistic vision espoused so frequently in Washington before the war, Kissinger might argue that it is far more responsible than risking civil war and chaos in order to defy the region's cultural realities.

The sociological strain of thought runs strong among the current U.S. foreign policy elite. Curiously, though, thinking in terms of political culture does not point opinion leaders toward the same conclusions. Larry Diamond and Kenneth Pollack believe the United States can design a system that will shape a democratic Iraqi society. By contrast, Francis Fukuyama and Henry Kissinger see culture as far more deep-seated and therefore do not see much hope in creating democracy in Iraq. Meanwhile, Charles Krauthammer has stood on both sides of the issue, with the unending violence prompting him to see Iraqi's political culture as a possibly immovable obstruction, fatal to his grand plans.

#### **4. THE SEQUENTIALIST APPROACH IN THE U.S. FOREIGN POLICY DEBATE**

Before the third wave of democracy began in the nineteen-seventies, it was common wisdom that democracies required certain preconditions in order to take root and thrive. Democracy was understood to be for the exceptional few countries that had managed, through a fortuitous combination of events, to organize their economies and state structures in such a way as to be conducive to democratic governance. Therefore, it was assumed that those countries seeking to make the transition to democracy would have to first develop economically and establish a strong state apparatus. These in-vogue notions were often used to justify the advanced democracies' support of authoritarian rulers—dictators were supposedly effective at bringing about economic modernization, which someday would lead to democracy. This thinking changed, however, when authoritarian regimes by the dozen began to be replaced by democracies in the late seventies and eighties, irrespective of level of development. As this trend continued, sequentialist assumptions were seemingly washed away by the third wave.

Thirty years after the start of the latest democratic expansion, however, the failure of many of the third wave democracies and the continuing struggles of those remaining have led to a resurgence of the sequentialist model. In the United States in particular, debate over Iraqi democracy has been infused with discussions of idealized sequences of economic and political development. No opinion leader has been more decidedly in the sequentialist camp than Fareed Zakaria, editor of *Newsweek International* and frequent contributor to newspapers and magazines. His ideas have reached a wide audience because of his broadcast and print commentary, and his latest book, *The Future of Freedom*, has become a *New York Times* bestseller. Because of this influence, any examination of the discourse of the U.S. foreign policy establishment must include a discussion of Zakaria's work.

In his book, Zakaria explains what he believes are the necessary steps to be taken before a society makes the transition to democracy, and warns against holding elections before certain prerequisites are fulfilled. While he professes to not believe in a fixed sequence, he does say that “European deviations from the Anglo-American pattern—constitutionalism and capitalism first, only then democracy—were far less successful in producing liberal democracy.”<sup>1</sup> The most important prerequisite for Zakaria is capitalist economic development, which he calls the “simplest explanation for a new democracy’s political success.”<sup>2</sup> Here Zakaria directly applies Lipset’s thesis, and cites Przeworski and Limongi in his own calculation of the likelihood of democratic consolidation in various countries. Borrowing from Przeworski and Limongi, he says, “Political regimes change for varied reasons—war, economic crises, death. But when an autocratic regime does collapse and people try to establish a democracy, what makes it last? Historically, the best single answer to that question has been wealth.”<sup>3</sup>

The reason why economic development unintentionally breeds liberalization is because it “allows key segments of society—most important, private business and the broader bourgeoisie—to gain power independent of the state,” and “in bargaining with these elements the state tends to become less rapacious and capricious and more rule-oriented and responsive to society’s needs, or at least to the needs of the elite of that society.”<sup>4</sup> In order for such capitalist economic growth to be possible, there must be a well-functioning state that can enforce rules, because “without a government capable of protecting property rights and human rights, press

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<sup>1</sup> Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 58.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-72.

freedoms and business contracts, antitrust laws and consumer demands, a society gets not the rule of law but the rule of the strong.”<sup>5</sup>

With specific regard to Iraq, Zakaria warned in 2003 that the task of modernizing the country’s economy would be hindered by its reliance on oil as its chief commodity. Having the easy cash flows from oil, he said, provides an exemption from “the hard work of modernizing your country, creating a framework of laws, creating the kinds of institutions and policies that create a middle class, that create law and order.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, the “whole process that in the West or in East Asia you have to go through to get to a modern society” is bypassed in oil rich countries like Iraq, which is why, he claimed, no oil-rich country save Norway is a liberal democracy.<sup>7</sup> Because he believed Iraq was unlikely to be able to diversify its economy and begin the process of modernization that he deemed necessary for democracy, he cautioned against holding elections so soon after the fall of Saddam.

Another reason why Zakaria was unwilling to support a rapid program of democratization in Iraq was his belief in the need for a stable political system to exist before people choose their leaders. The first task for Iraq, he said, was “to first establish what the rules of the game are before we let the system pick the winners.”<sup>8</sup> Concomitant with that task is the need to fill the power vacuum. Citing the Federalist Papers, he said, “when constructing a government, you have two basic things you need to do. The first is control the governed, and secondly, have the government control itself.”<sup>9</sup> Following closely in the footsteps of Samuel Huntington, Zakaria deemed the formation of a state capable of maintaining order as the primary concern—the function of government is to govern, after all. Only once this is accomplished can we worry

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 76-77.

<sup>6</sup> Fareed Zakaria, interview by Bob Edwards, *Morning Edition*, NPR, April 17, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Fareed Zakaria, interview by John Ydstie, *Weekend All Things Considered*, NPR, April 12, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Zakaria (footnote 6).



about the establishment of a democratic system that would check the state's power. Taken all together, Zakaria's prescribed sequence is clear: modernize the economy and consolidate state power, establish a political system and rules of the game, and then hold elections to choose leaders.

If Zakaria saw Iraq's oil wealth as a likely curse, then Kenneth Pollack saw it as more of a blessing. Writing with Daniel Byman in 2003, Pollack argued that while "Iraq is hardly ideal soil for growing democracy," it "is not as infertile as other places where democracy has taken root."<sup>10</sup> The reasons for this, he wrote, are Iraq's numerous economic advantages that include its vast oil wealth and "tremendous" agricultural potential. In addition to these physical assets, Pollack listed Iraq's rather literate populace as an attribute that can generate economic growth:

Prior to the Persian Gulf War, its population was probably the best educated, most secular, and most progressive of all the Arab states. Although it has been devastated economically over the past 12 years, Iraq has many lawyers, doctors, and professors. Together, they could constitute the base of a resurgent Iraqi middle class and thus an important building block of democracy.<sup>11</sup>

The key here is the growth of a middle class, which sequentialist and modernization theorists point to as essential for the sustenance of a democracy. Unlike Zakaria, who believed for various reasons that large endowments of oil are an obstacle to democracy because they inhibit the establishment of a middle class, Pollack believed that the remnants of Iraq's former middle class could simply develop to a point where they could support a democracy, and that natural wealth can only aid in this development. Thus, in his analysis, Pollack considered national assets, both in terms of natural resources and human capital, as conducive to the establishment of democratic governance.

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack, "Democracy in Iraq?" *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 120.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Joining Zakaria and Pollack in the conviction that economic growth is necessary for democracy to take root is Henry Kissinger. In his contribution to a volume about U.S. policy in Iraq, he wrote:

It is important to remember that the most successful building of democracy in the last half-century occurred when non-democratic regimes in places like Korea, Taiwan, and Turkey fostered an economic growth that produced middle classes, which in turn, with some American help, insisted on representative institutions and checks and balances.<sup>12</sup>

While the situations in Taiwan and Turkey were different from that of Iraq today in that they were not occupied by the United States, we can infer from this statement that Kissinger believed Iraq must develop economically before we can expect it to support a viable democratic government. In order for this to happen, he wrote, Iraq must also have a government capable of directing economic development. Therefore, “The creation of a governing authority on July 1 [2003] is the first small step on a long road toward stability from which a secular middle class can emerge strong enough to insist on full representative government.”<sup>13</sup> Understandably, the idea of placing preference on economic growth over democratic development is difficult to reconcile with the universalist values of many Americans. In a bow to the universalist desire for “democracy now,” and perhaps in response to criticisms of his own past support for authoritarian dictators, Kissinger wrote, “America needs urgently to develop a concept of political evolution that combines the authority required for economic progress with the human rights required for democratic evolution.”<sup>14</sup> But since such a concept does not yet exist we can assume that Kissinger would choose supporting a strong government that can foster economic development over a democratic one with weak enforcement capability.

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<sup>12</sup> Kissinger, “Intervention with a Vision,” 52.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-53.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

While Larry Diamond also believes in the contribution of social and economic conditions to democratization, he is much more qualified in his belief. For example, in 1995 he wrote, “socioeconomic development (especially at higher levels) does alter political culture, class structure, civil society, and patterns of participation in ways that make stable democracy more likely.”<sup>15</sup> In this sense, the socioeconomic conditions of a country are not determining factors, but do help in the endurance of democratic reform. More accurately, he sees economic modernization as a significant dynamic, but only as a potential influence on what he sees as the more important variable of political culture.

In terms of sequences, what Diamond is far more interested in is state formation. As he put it concisely in his latest book, “You can’t build a democratic state unless you first have a state.”<sup>16</sup> In previous writings on democratization, he argued for a strong state for a variety of reasons, including the ability to maintain rule of law, the ability to form and execute effective economic policy, and the ability to maintain civilian control over the military.<sup>17</sup> Nowadays, when writing about Iraq, he heavily emphasizes security as the one condition that is absolutely necessary for democracy to be possible, and thus the main reason for constructing a strong state:

In postconflict situations in which the state has collapsed, security trumps everything: it is the central pedestal that supports all else. Without some minimum level of security, people cannot engage in trade and commerce, organize to rebuild their communities, or participate meaningfully in politics.<sup>18</sup>

Framing the situation in more philosophical terms, Diamond wrote, “The first lesson [of our experience in Iraq] is that you cannot get to Jefferson and Madison without going through Thomas Hobbes.”<sup>19</sup> The insurgency continues to present the new Iraqi state with a serious

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<sup>15</sup> Diamond, *Promoting Democracy in the 1990s*, 60.

<sup>16</sup> Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 305.

<sup>17</sup> See Diamond, *Promoting Democracy in the 1990s*.

<sup>18</sup> Diamond, “What Went Wrong in Iraq?” 37.

<sup>19</sup> Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 305.

challenge to its authority, and has plunged Iraqi society into a near Hobbesian state of nature in which violence begets violence and different ethnic and religious factions compete for control. The only way to lift the Iraqi people out of such a mess is to provide the security necessary for a culture of trust and peaceful political competition, which in turn is only possible if the Iraqi state can stamp out challenges to its power:

[T]he essential condition for a state is that it must have an effective monopoly over the means of violence...Muscular force must be deployed in sufficient depth throughout the country, and particularly in potential hot spots, to preempt looting, secure key facilities, deter troublemakers, demobilize militias, confront spoilers, and capture and kill terrorist and diehard elements.<sup>20</sup>

The capacity to establish such a monopoly of force is not easy, Diamond conceded, adding, “Rebuilding the state is typically a slow process that requires an extended transitional period of rule by—or with the extensive support of—the international community.”<sup>21</sup>

While Diamond is “cautious about stipulating a fixed sequence, right and true for all countries and circumstances,” he says “you cannot escape” the fact that “[y]ou have to establish some minimum of order on the ground and a functioning state before you can have democracy. You have to have some commitment to that overarching state before you hold national elections.”<sup>22</sup> The consequences of holding elections before establishing an adequately strong state are severe:

Ill-timed and ill-prepared elections do not produce democracy, or even political stability, after conflict. Instead, they may enhance the power of actors who incite coercion, fear, and prejudice, thereby reviving autocracy and even precipitating large-scale strife... There are thus powerful reasons to defer national elections until militias have been demobilized, moderate parties trained and assisted, electoral infrastructure created, and democratic media and ideas generated.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>22</sup> Larry Diamond, e-mail interview by the author, February 5, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 310.

The first three steps Diamond lists here are all integral parts of developing state capacity, but it is clear from his other writings that achieving a monopoly of violence—in this instance demobilizing militias—is the chief requirement for making conditions favorable for democracy.

The ever-deteriorating situation in Iraq has led democratic universalist Charles Krauthammer to share Diamond's view on the importance of establishing a strong state before democracy can bloom. In 2006, Krauthammer argued that the chances the United States will win the war in Iraq, which he defined as leaving behind a “functioning, self-sustaining, Western-friendly constitutional government,” was dependant on “whether the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki can face up to its two potentially mortal threats: the Sunni insurgency and the challenge from Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, al-Maliki must achieve an effective monopoly of violence as well as establish his government as the sole legitimate authority.

In the same vein as Diamond and Krauthammer, Francis Fukuyama has focused on the importance of state building, most notably in his book *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*,<sup>25</sup> in which he takes a very Huntingtonian stance regarding the importance of state capacity above all other issues. While in this book he is not explicit on the need for a strong state before democracy, he does attach great importance to state building for keeping countries from falling apart. However, in addition to his book, Fukuyama wrote in 2004 that when the United States was able to build democracy abroad in the past, it was able to do so because strong state structures were already in place:

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Krauthammer, “Iraq: A Civil War We Can Win,” *The Washington Post*, A17, September 8, 2006, national edition. In Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>25</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *State Building: Governance and World Order in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

The cases of unambiguous success—Germany, Japan, and South Korea—were all ones in which U.S. forces came and then stayed indefinitely. In the first two cases, we were not nation-building at all, but only re-legitimizing societies that had very powerful states.<sup>26</sup>

Scholar Noah Feldman—to whom we will return in more detail later— joins Fukuyama in this assessment of past democratization successes when he attributes the relative ease of the Eastern European democratic transitions to the maintenance of the same state structures that existed prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>27</sup> Thus, like Diamond, and to a lesser extent Kissinger, Fukuyama and Feldman strongly believe in the existence of a functioning and sturdy state as a prerequisite for democracy.

As is to be expected, the sequentialist approach has not been prevalent in the statements of Bush administration officials. While the administration does frequently include economic development as a goal in Iraq, it is meant as an end to be achieved in itself and not as a necessary stepping-stone to democracy, especially since the democratic universalist members of the administration insist that democracy needs no prerequisites. However, even among the most ardent supporters of the goal to build democracy in Iraq there have been hints of sequentialist thinking. For example, Paul Wolfowitz' earlier writings indicated a sense that economic development is key to democratic development:

[O]ne should be wary of a policy that devotes equal effort to promoting democracy everywhere, regardless of the particular circumstances. Aside from the question of the importance of a country for U.S. interests, we cannot ignore the uncomfortable fact that economic and social conditions may better prepare some countries for democracy than others.<sup>28</sup>

In this view, the United States is limited in its ability to promote democracy by economic circumstances on the ground. In the same article, Wolfowitz, like Fukuyama and Feldman,

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<sup>26</sup> Fukuyama, "The Neoconservative Moment," 175.

<sup>27</sup> See Noah Feldman, *What We Owe Iraq: War and the Ethics of Nation Building* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 47.

<sup>28</sup> Wolfowitz, "Statesmanship in the New Century," 319.

attributed the success of past U.S. efforts at democracy building in Germany and Japan to those countries' advanced level of economic development. If his support for the U.S. project in Iraq is to mesh with his earlier statements, then at the time of the invasion he must have believed that Iraq's economy was sufficiently modern to support a democratic government.

Like Wolfowitz, Richard Perle has suggested that he believes there is a proper sequence of democratization, though he is much more optimistic than his former colleague about the United States' ability to change conditions on the ground so as to make them favorable for democracy. In his book with David Frum, Perle wrote, “[d]emocracy is most apt to survive and flourish when the local economy is strong.”<sup>29</sup> Here he agreed with Wolfowitz, but where Wolfowitz took this as limiting the scope of U.S. democracy-building, Perle saw it as just one more thing the United States must accomplish in order to be successful. Since “creating the conditions for a successful economy can again require more help,” the United States can step in with assistance, “like the help we provided when we encouraged the democratization of Central America in the 1980s.”<sup>30</sup> So, if the economic situation of a target country like Iraq is not favorable, then the United States can offer whatever economic aid is necessary to spur growth, which in turn will help democracy take root.

In addition to a strong and stable economy, Perle and Frum believed that democracy requires other conditions before elections should be held. Like Diamond, they wrote, “democratization does not mean calling immediate elections and then living with whatever happens next.”<sup>31</sup> They illustrated their thinking by invoking the case of Algeria's “rushed” elections in 1995, which “would have brought Islamic extremists to power as the only available

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<sup>29</sup> Perle and Frum, *An End to Evil*, 278.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

alternative to the corrupt status quo.”<sup>32</sup> Elections must be preceded, or at least accompanied, by economic growth and deregulation, the creation of “representative institutions that protect minorities and women,” and the “opening of political spaces” in which people can participate meaningfully in politics.<sup>33</sup> While their necessary conditions did not explicitly include a strong state structure with a monopoly of force, the development of institutions and a political system are integral parts of a well-functioning state. Thus, even though one would expect the opposite from such democratic universalists, both Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle have espoused ideas about democratic sequences. This need not be a contradiction, though, so long as the sequence prescribed is believed to be a doable feat for any country. By this standard, then, it is evident that Perle is more thoroughly universalist than Wolfowitz, who argued that in some less-developed countries, economic conditions put democracy out of the question.

Though sequentialist thinking was not widespread among Bush administration officials in Washington, in Baghdad it found support from a rather unlikely source—Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III, Presidential Envoy to Iraq and head of the CPA from May 2003 to June 2004. As the chosen representative of the White House in Iraq, it would be natural to expect that Bremer would have been a part of the democratic universalist consensus. To an extent this was true. He certainly did profess faith in the overall objective of bringing democracy to Iraq, saying in his memoirs that he “shared [Wolfowitz’s] belief that a democratic Iraq could revolutionize the region.”<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, during his time working at the CPA under Bremer, Larry Diamond detected “a pervasive Wilsonian universalist sense of the possible, the necessary, the morally

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> L. Paul Bremer III, *My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 171.



right” among the officials there, including Bremer.<sup>35</sup> However, though Bremer may have agreed with the administration’s goals for democracy, his opinion diverged on the matter of how soon the Iraqis could handle sovereignty, saying he “was certain this would take time and patience.”<sup>36</sup>

The initial divergence in opinion over when to transfer sovereignty widened into a more serious disagreement during Bremer’s yearlong tenure. Bremer describes in his memoirs what he calls a “‘sovereignty now’ campaign” headed by Paul Wolfowitz, Defense Under Secretary for Policy Douglas Feith, and John Hannah of the Vice President’s office, all of which were espousing the favored policy of Ahmad Chalabi.<sup>37</sup> Adherents to this view, he writes, wanted control of Iraq to be handed over to Iraqis as soon as possible, reflecting their universalist belief that the Iraqis would be able to form and sustain a democracy with minimal preparation. Bremer’s account is full of repeated attempts on his part to counteract such thinking. For example, he describes an instance when he learned of a draft policy from Douglas Feith’s office that included “early sovereignty” for Iraq, and wrote that “*Somebody’s got to finally drive a stake through that concept.*”<sup>38</sup> While it is not abundantly clear what conditions Bremer believed Iraq failed to satisfy, there is some indication that he saw Iraqi society lacking the capacity to form a strong enough state. Such a belief is suggested in a conversation Bremer describes between himself and Wolfowitz:

“You guys don’t seem to understand how ineffective the [Governing Council] is turning out to be.” I chose my words, did not mince them. “Those people couldn’t organize a parade, let alone run the country.”<sup>39</sup>

In this exchange, Bremer is arguing against Douglas Feith’s plan to make the Iraqi Governing Council into a Provisional Government on the grounds that the Council is devoid of effective

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<sup>35</sup> Larry Diamond, e-mail interview by the author, February 5, 2007.

<sup>36</sup> Bremer, *My Year in Iraq*, 171.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 170. Emphasis in original.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

leadership and administration. While this may simply be indicative of Bremer's lack of confidence in the specific members of the Council, it also reflects his idea that Iraq was not quite ready for full sovereignty because it lacked an effective government to administer the country. In this way, Bremer, the most important U.S. official on the ground in Iraq, can be viewed as a somewhat sequentialist thinker. While he expressed wholehearted agreement with the idea that Iraq could and would become a democracy, he nevertheless was less enthusiastic than his Washington colleagues about how swiftly and easily the task would be accomplished.

## **5. THE RATIONAL CHOICE APPROACH IN THE U.S. FOREIGN POLICY DEBATE**

The last prominent approach to establishing democratic governance that we see in the U.S. foreign policy establishment is the rational choice, or economic, approach. The hallmark of policy recommendations based on rational choice is that they assume actors—specifically, the elites of various interest groups—decide whether or not to accept a democratic arrangement based on the costs and benefits to them of living under such an arrangement. If one group believes that it would be better off under a different arrangement, like dominating other groups in an authoritarian regime, then it will choose to reject democratic governance and power-sharing. If it sees the prospect of dominating everyone else as unlikely, then it will prefer instead to share power with other groups so as to ensure that it is not repressed. In this approach, therefore, the question of establishing democracy becomes a collective action problem in which the interests, and hence the preferences, of the most powerful actors must align in favor of sharing control under a democratic government.

The most decidedly rationalist policy recommendation in U.S. foreign policy circles is that of Noah Feldman. A legal scholar and expert on constitutional law at New York University, Feldman served as Senior Constitutional Advisor to the CPA in Baghdad in 2003. From his high-level advisory position and through his public commentary since leaving Baghdad, Feldman has exerted a significant sway in the debate over Iraq's future. Most important among his public recommendations is his book *What We Owe Iraq*, in which he explores the ethical dilemmas of the occupation as well as his experience with the CPA and what he believes is the best way forward for the United States in Iraq.<sup>1</sup>

With regard to leaving behind a lasting democracy, Feldman casts the problem as a need to convince Iraq's Sunnis, specifically the insurgency, that it is in their best interests to lay down

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<sup>1</sup> Noah Feldman, *What We Owe Iraq* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

their arms and join the Shi‘a and Kurds in a power-sharing arrangement. For him, this task is not simply a propaganda campaign. Rather, it is necessary because it reflects reality. Because he asserts that “no power association in the country could reasonably believe that it alone would be able to govern the country and dominate everybody else,”<sup>2</sup> he believes that “[d]emocracy, then, was not merely the best political arrangement that could work in contemporary Iraq. Once it was realized that no single player could create an effective tyranny, democracy was also the only option other than chaos.”<sup>3</sup>

Following Saddam Hussein’s ouster, he says, the Sunnis believed that they may still have had a chance of sabotaging the effort to establish constitutional democracy, and that they may still have been able to regain some semblance of their formerly dominant position in the old regime:

In the formal terms favored by the game theorists who model democratization, some nontrivial number of Sunnis seemed to believe that the summed costs and benefits to them of subverting the emergence of a democratic government in Iraq outweighed the costs and benefits of entering into a democratic state in which they feared becoming permanent losers.<sup>4</sup>

In saying this, Feldman does not mean that the Sunnis believed they had any realistic hope of reasserting the kind of dominance they enjoyed with Saddam in power. Rather, he claims that they feared that their weak demographic situation in relation to the Shi‘a and Kurds, who had suffered mightily under the Sunni Ba‘athist regime, would spell disaster for them in a democratic government. Therefore, both in order to avoid retribution and in order to retain as much of their former privileges as possible, they chose to fight the formation of a democratic system.

The strategies of the Sunni insurgent groups, as Feldman describes, varied, but they shared two goals: to stall the establishment of constitutional democracy as long as possible, and

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 43.

to signal their willingness to resist oppression. The most prevalent strategy to achieve the first goal, according to Feldman, was the following:

[B]y killing Iraqi police and disrupting the possibilities of transition, the insurgents might be able to delay the emergence of a state with the power to enforce the laws. They could delay that process long enough for the United States to run out of patience and decide it was too costly to remain as an occupier. This scenario would also result in eventual American withdrawal, opening the door for the Sunnis to reassert control.<sup>5</sup>

Feldman adds, “some Sunnis even believed that long-term anarchy would be preferable to living under Shi‘i domination.”<sup>6</sup> A second reason Feldman postulates for the Sunnis’ opposition to Iraqi democracy is cost signaling. Feldman writes, “One reason for the Sunni insurgency during the occupation was that Sunnis wanted to convince the Shi‘a and the Kurds that oppressing them or simply denying them a full share of state resources would be very costly.”<sup>7</sup>

Seeing the conflict in Iraq through this rationalist lens, the solution to the problem appears simple—to convince the parties involved that democracy and sharing power is in their best interests. For Feldman, the most important actors that need convincing are the Sunni insurgents:

[T]he great challenge for an elected Iraqi government in which Shi‘is are the most numerous will be to assure Iraq’s Sunnis that they will not be treated as they treated the Shi‘a and the Kurds. To draw again on the game theorists, the Shi‘a and the Kurds must convince the overwhelming majority of Sunnis that their interests will be better served in a democratic government in which power will alternate than by continuing the insurgency to the point of civil war.<sup>8</sup>

While this solution seems simple, it is not. Reassuring a chronically insecure group that it has nothing to fear takes more than words—it requires guarantees. Feldman writes that the hardest part “will be to create institutions that will give Sunnis a reasonable hope of garnering a fair

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

share of the spoils of electoral victory.’<sup>9</sup> He does not define what he means by a “fair share”, but we can assume that he intends for Sunnis to feel comfortable that their voices will not be silenced by the Shi‘a majority. This implies institutions that give Sunnis some sort of veto power, and also possible power-sharing arrangements that will guarantee them a role in the country’s government. In this way, the Sunnis will see that joining the Kurds and Shi‘a in a democratic union will be preferable to incurring the high costs of a continuing insurgency.

The rationalist bent Feldman displays in his writing stems directly from the game theory of Adam Przeworski, who Feldman cites in his discussion of Iraq’s democratic coordination problem. However, while Feldman does choose the vocabulary of game theory to describe the situation in Iraq, he does not cast it as a simple game with Sunni and Shi‘a players. Still, he does take the assumptions of Przeworski’s game theoretic model that actors are rational and choose to participate in power-sharing arrangements based on calculations of cost and benefit. Another theorist to whom Feldman’s argument is indebted is Lipset—Feldman’s suggestion that the Sunnis be guaranteed some share of power in any Iraqi democratic institutions is reminiscent of Lipset’s theory that old elites must be incorporated into the new order if a democracy is to be viable.

Lipset’s thesis about co-optation of old elites is also echoed, somewhat unexpectedly, in the commentary of Larry Diamond. Even though he is most well known as a political culture theorist, Diamond has also exhibited some elements of rational choice thinking in his contemporary writings about Iraq, specifically in regard to how a democracy can emerge out of the violent conflict that has erupted since the invasion. For example, he writes:

Indeed, the American occupation created a context in which former Ba‘athists, mainly Sunnis, not only faced the loss of their previous dominance but were excluded from any real share of power and resources. This situation pushed some Iraqis who might

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

otherwise have been co-opted into the new system toward violent resistance, which came to seem like a rational strategy for driving away the Americans or at least changing the terms they were offering.<sup>10</sup>

Just as Lipset discussed the importance of co-opting former elites into the new order, Diamond speaks of bringing members of the old regime into the new political process so as not to induce fears of exclusion and repression by the majority.

Also, much like Feldman, Diamond sometimes portrays the Sunni insurgents as rational actors who have decided to reject power-sharing democracy and pursue a strategy of violent resistance in order to preserve as much of their former power as possible:

In the political flux of a decaying or collapsed regime, or a long period of violence and civil strife, competing ethnic, religious, class, and political actors do not embrace constitutional democracy out of idealism or magnanimity. Typically, they would prefer victory to compromise, domination to toleration, and power monopoly to power sharing.<sup>11</sup>

Because of such actor preferences, Diamond says the current “situation presents, in the language of political science, a massive ‘coordination problem.’ The only way to solve it is through the simultaneous commitment, on the part of all major actors, to a series of restraints.”<sup>12</sup> According to Diamond, the only way the relevant actors in Iraq will agree to share power is if they see doing so as serving their best interests, not because they intrinsically prefer democracy to other forms of government. He writes, “[a] stable and even partially democratic Iraq will not be possible unless all major groups decide that they have more to gain from the arena of peaceful politics than they do from violent insurgency and terrorism.”<sup>13</sup> It is curious that a political culture theorist such as Diamond would display such seemingly strong rational choice beliefs. Even if Diamond does not subscribe fully to a rationalist view of the situation in Iraq, presenting

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<sup>10</sup> Diamond, “What Went Wrong in Iraq?” 44.

<sup>11</sup> Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 316.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Larry Diamond, “Building Democracy After Conflict: Lessons from Iraq,” *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 1 (January 2005): 22.

those rationalist arguments he does make is important for seeing the importance of this strand of thought in the U.S. foreign policy community.

In addition to Feldman and Diamond, neoconservatives like Charles Krauthammer, William Kristol, and Robert Kagan have shown similar support for the rational choice approach to democratic origins. For example, in a 2006 editorial in *The Washington Post* Krauthammer wrote, “[i]n Iraq, amnesty will necessarily be part of any co-optation strategy in which insurgents lay down their arms.”<sup>14</sup> In order to convince the Sunni insurgents that they are better off agreeing to join the new constitutional political system, Krauthammer believes that they must be granted amnesty as both an incentive and a guarantee. In a later article he more explicitly depicted the Sunnis as rational actors, saying, “The vast majority of Sunnis are fighting not for ideology but for a share of power and (oil) money. A deal with them is eminently possible and could co-opt enough Sunnis to greatly shrink the insurgency.”<sup>15</sup> Again, we see the Sunnis portrayed as actors fighting for a share of control over Iraq’s politics and resources. In this view, they can be persuaded and cajoled into accepting democratic government if their insecurities are put to rest. Kristol and Kagan have also revealed such a rationalist view of the Sunni insurgents, though their prescription for dealing with them was rather different than that of Krauthammer. They wrote in late 2005 that because of the tougher counterinsurgency strategy of “clear and hold,” there might have been “a realization among Sunnis that the insurgency is not winning, and thus may not be the best way for them to recover their lost power—or even to strengthen their bargaining position.”<sup>16</sup> By pursuing a more effective counterinsurgency strategy, the Americans and their Iraqi allies could possibly raise the costs for the Sunni insurgents to the point that they

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Krauthammer, “Amnesty for Insurgents?” *The Washington Post*, A27, June 20, 2006, national edition.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Krauthammer, “A Civil War We Can Win.”

<sup>16</sup> Robert Kagan and William Kristol, “Happy Days,” 8.



would far outweigh any potential benefits to be gained from continued resistance. Though taking a tougher stance on the insurgents than Krauthammer, Feldman, and Diamond, Kristol and Kagan nevertheless treated the Sunnis in this instance as rational actors.

One more opinion leader whose rationalist-leaning arguments are worth considering is Brendan O’Leary. Like Feldman and Kristol and Kagan, O’Leary treats the Sunni insurgency as being composed of rational actors. Rather than seeing it as “mere chaos, banditry, and criminal lawlessness,” he says that there is a “political logic” to the armed resistance.<sup>17</sup> This logic is that the Sunni Arabs do not want to join in a power-sharing democracy with the Shi’a and Kurds because to do so would “ratify the Sunni Arabs’ loss of power.”<sup>18</sup> By contrast, the “Shi’a Arabs see no need for violence because they will be the primary stakeholders, both in the interim government and after free elections.”<sup>19</sup> The only apparent exception among the Shi’a to this abstinence from violence is the cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, who rationally pursues a strategy of violence and intimidation because he “can contemplate success through both bombs and the ballot box.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, by casting the violence in Iraq as a strategy to extract benefits and alter the terms of debate, O’Leary makes a rationalist argument about why certain groups and actors have chosen not to endorse democratic government.

O’Leary’s writings on Iraq display a rationalist bent in another way. In writing about Kurdistan and whether it is better off joining the Iraqi federation or seceding, he cites Albert Hirschman’s theory about the break-up of organizations.<sup>21</sup> He writes, “[n]ations in federations, like citizens and consumers confronted with decline in the quality of states or private

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<sup>17</sup> Brendan O’Leary, “Vistas of Exits from Baghdad,” 300.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> See Albert Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

organizations, may be conceived of as having three choices: exit, voice, or loyalty.”<sup>22</sup> If the present governing arrangement is not advantageous for a nation or other political community, then it will decide to exit. O’Leary believes that a “pluri-national federation”—more specifically, a “*bi-national, multiethnic, tolerantly religiously plural, and multiregional*” federation—will allow “minority nations at least to consider ‘voice’ before ‘exit.’”<sup>23</sup> In other words, political actors will choose to participate in political arrangements if they have a reasonable likelihood of being able to protect their interests in the new system.

Applied to Iraq, the theory predicts that Kurdistan is more likely to remain a part of the country so long as it believes it has the opportunity to pursue and protect its interests under the political arrangement created by the constitution. These interests can be both political and economic, with O’Leary observing that “other things being equal, federations that over time facilitate increasing per capita prosperity, have better prospects of success.”<sup>24</sup> Looked at in this way, the great concern and detail O’Leary pays to the proper design of a constitution—which was treated in chapter three as an indication of democratic universalist thinking—can now also be understood as the result of rationalist assumptions. For him, finding the ideal balance between centralized and decentralized, majoritarian and consensual, national and pluri-national government is all a matter of finding the just the right formula that will convince the Kurds it is in their best interests to remain part of Iraq. The best way to do this, he writes, is to construct a pluri-national federation based on the principles of consociation put forth by Lijphart:

Combining federal and consociational principles is crucial to creating a democratic Iraq. There is no workable alternative if Iraq is to be democratized and if the reconstructed state’s relationships with Kurds and Kurdistan are to be based on recognition, partnership, and equality.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Brendan O’Leary, “Power-Sharing, Pluralist Federation, and Federacy,” 74.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Emphasis in original.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 78.

Making Iraq's central government a "cartel of elites" would provide some assurance to the Kurds that their minority status will not leave them vulnerable to the oppression of the Arab majority. In this way, O'Leary uses principles of consociationalism in order to solve the collective action problem of getting Kurds, Shi'a, and Sunnis to unite in a democratic government.

## **6. EVALUATING THE THEORIES AND THEIR APPLICATION TO IRAQ**

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### ***Classification of Opinion Leaders***

In order to come to meaningful judgments about the application of the various approaches to the project for an Iraqi democracy, it is first useful to summarize the arguments of U.S. foreign policy elites and to classify them according to which approaches they adhere.

Overall, only some of the opinion leaders examined in this study can be accurately described as belonging exclusively to one of the four categories of democratic theory. Larry Diamond is unquestionably a political culture theorist, while Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Charles Krauthammer, William Kristol, and Robert Kagan are all democratic universalists to varying degrees. Francis Fukuyama and Fareed Zakaria can most fairly be labeled as sequentialists, while Noah Feldman is most aptly described as subscribing to rational choice theory.

Other contributors to the debate are harder to pin down. Paul Bremer presided over the CPA as President Bush's personal representative, suggesting that his beliefs about democracy coincided with the Administration's democratic universalist tilt. However, once in Baghdad he was reluctant to hand over sovereignty as soon as his colleagues in Washington demanded, indicating that he thought democracy required some preparation. In the end, though, it may be fair to place Bremer in the universalist camp because he presided over a CPA pervaded by that perspective, and his ideal timetable for the handover of sovereignty differed from the one coming out of the Pentagon by only a matter of months or a few years.

Three other opinion leaders who appear to straddle several categories are Kenneth Pollack, Henry Kissinger, and Brendan O'Leary. The first of these displayed universalist ideas when he cited the large number of democratic transitions in the last thirty years as evidence that

Iraq can sustain democracy. He wrote from a cultural perspective when outlining his plan for the gradual habituation of Iraqis to democratic values and the use of traditional power structures in distributing resources. And he wrote that a resurgent Iraqi middle class would lead to stable democracy. Like Pollack, Henry Kissinger cannot be adequately classified as belonging to one or another groups because he uses both culture and economic development as equal reasons why he believes Iraq is not yet ready for democracy. Brendan O’Leary seems to straddle three categories—universalism in his belief in the wide applicability of his consociational principles, rational choice in his writing about exit, voice, and loyalty, and political culture in his explanation for why Kurdistan is more democratic than the rest of Iraq.

### *Inconsistencies in Arguments*

Even though some of the foreign policy elites studied in this paper can be classified as subscribing to one or another approach to democratization, they all make arguments that belong to approaches different than their own. In some cases, this is not problematic—nothing about sequentialist theories is contradictory to sociological theories, and assumptions of rationality need not necessarily conflict with universalism. Ideas about political culture and ideas about sequences both presuppose the need for certain conditions, and differ only in regard to which prerequisites they stress. Therefore, using both ideas is not troublesome. For example, since his time in Iraq, Larry Diamond has emphasized the necessity of a strong state for democracy to take root. This requirement does not crowd out the importance of political culture for him, but rather goes hand in hand with what he see as the need to reconstruct Iraqi society and culture to be more favorable for democratic government. It can be argued that because he says a strong state must exist before a democratic state can emerge, his independent variable is now state

development—a fact that would place him firmly in the sequentialist category. However, since his previous work has focused on political culture, and since he continues to emphasize it, it is reasonable to assume he still fits in the sociological category. The more important point to keep in mind, though, is that because both political culture and sequentialist arguments can be seen as stressing certain preconditions for democracy, the fact that Diamond utilizes both is not problematic. Likewise, it is not theoretically inconsistent for Francis Fukuyama and Henry Kissinger to cite political culture, state development, and economic development as reasons why Iraq is not ready for democracy.

In a similar way, rational choice and universalist notions are not inherently incompatible. Neither see social and economic conditions as obstacles to the development of democracy, and rational choice allows for the rapid emergence of stable democracy so long as all the political forces are satisfied under the new system. Therefore, it is not inconsistent for a universalist like Charles Krauthammer to propose granting amnesty to Sunni insurgents in order to convince them that their interests will be served under the new order, or for William Kristol and Robert Kagan to recommend a tougher counterinsurgency strategy in order to convince the insurgents that resistance is more costly than accepting democracy. However, there is some tension between the rational choice and universalist approaches. While universalism assumes people will naturally choose democracy, rational choice predicts they will choose to abide by democratic rules only if they perceive it as being better than any other option—in other words, rational choice allows for the possibility that another system of government can be preferred. This tension is resolved, however, if one views universalism as a sort of rational choice theory in which groups are always assumed to be satisfied under democratic governments, or in which a constitution can be

properly designed so as to ensure satisfaction. In this way, Brendan O’Leary’s notions about rational action and constitutionalism are able to mesh well.

In other instances of theoretical cross-pollination, using arguments from different approaches can lead to serious inconsistencies. The most common discrepancy in this regard is seen among the democratic universalists. Because universalism assumes democracy can sprout anywhere so long as there exists some political will to liberate people, then any acknowledgement of required conditions is contradictory. For example, Paul Wolfowitz’ past comments about the importance of economic development for the stability of democracy potentially clash with his more recent pronouncements that democracy is universally applicable. Richard Perle has committed similar fallacies. However, as discussed previously, Wolfowitz’ more recent remarks need not necessarily conflict with his earlier statements, so long as he accepts the idea that some places are indeed better suited than others for democracy. If he holds more strongly to his universalist rhetoric, though, he contradicts himself.

Charles Krauthammer has also contradicted his past commentary in his more recent writing. His 2003 speech at the American Enterprise Institute, “Democratic Realism,” put forth perhaps the strongest and most emphatic case in contemporary public discourse for democratic universalism. In it he argued that while the United States must pick and choose where to promote democracy, it nevertheless has the ability to do so and people everywhere have the capacity to support it. His writings since then have argued that Iraq’s political culture, decimated by Saddam Hussein’s tyrannical rule, may not be suited for democracy after all. He has also written on the importance of a strong state apparatus as a condition for successful democratization. These acknowledgements are patent contradictions of his earlier rhetoric.

Another instance of inconsistency from a proponent of a different approach comes from Larry Diamond. In his book, he attributes many of the difficulties of establishing democracy in Iraq to the fact the United States failed to co-opt the formerly dominant Sunnis into the new order. He also acknowledges the existence of a “massive coordination problem” presented by the preferences of Iraq’s political forces for domination rather than power sharing. This language is suggestive of rational choice thinking, as discussed in chapter six, which is incompatible with political culture theory. Adam Przeworski, the theorist who framed democratization in terms of game theory, rejected any suggestion that arguments about political culture and rational choice can go together:

I am convinced that arguments about whether democracies are supported by acting out of values or by strategic pursuit of interests are not resolvable by direct reference to evidence. The two orientations have to and do compete with each other in making sense of the world around us.<sup>1</sup>

According to the sociological approach, people choose democracy because they hold certain values and attitudes. Rational choice, on the other hand, ignores values and instead looks at raw interests and how political actors perceive them. Under that approach, values are irrelevant for understanding political action. Diamond defends his assertions by saying he does not believe “you need to be steeped in rational choice theory to grasp” his point about co-optation and the coordination problem. Nevertheless, the introduction of these ideas is problematic for his overall emphasis on political culture and state development.

### ***Critiques of the Classic Theories***

Besides issues of compatibility between different types of theories, the opinion leaders face other more serious problems with their arguments—the deeper flaws in the classic theories on which

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<sup>1</sup> Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*, 24.



their arguments are based. All social science theories have their shortcomings, and theories about democracy's origins are no different. Therefore, the following section will review the available academic critiques of the sociological, sequentialist, and rational choice approaches, and will then turn to a consideration of what the actual experience in Iraq can teach us about the theories. Because democratic universalism is essentially critiqued in each of the three other approaches—since its assumption is that democracy is automatic—its treatment will wait for the section on real world application.

The first critique is that of Brian Barry, who offered an incisive analysis of cultural arguments in his book *Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy*.<sup>2</sup> First, he wrote that such arguments have difficulty coming up with a precise definition of democracy and democratic values. Second, even when some are able to come up with a solid definition of democracy, they cannot form a satisfying hypothesis that describes how the values of a particular society affect its level of democracy. Third, and most important, it is not at all clear what the causal link is between a society's values and its level of democracy. It could very well be that a democratic government fosters a democratic culture, or that both are caused by a separate independent variable.<sup>3</sup>

Turning now to a critique of the sequentialist literature, Thomas Carothers offers a concise and elegant case why theories about sequences are based on false premises.<sup>4</sup> He notes that sequentialist theories about democratic transition logically imply that autocrats must do the work of economic and state development—if democracies cannot emerge without economic growth and a strong state, then naturally it must be authoritarian regimes that bring them about.

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<sup>2</sup> Brian Barry, *Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Carothers, "How Democracies Emerge: The Sequencing Fallacy," *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 1 (January 2007): 12-27.

One major problem with this reasoning, he says, is that “autocracy, whether liberal or nonliberal, is inherently in tension with both rule-of-law development and state-building.”<sup>5</sup> While sequentialists hope that democracy can emerge after “enlightened” strongmen “à la Mustafa Kemal Atatürk or Otto von Bismarck” pursue programs of rule of law, state building, and economic development, empirically this does not bear out. Carothers points out that “for every effective state-building strongman of the past century, there have been dozens more autocrats whose self-serving, erratic leadership has resulted in tremendously debilitated states rife with patronage, corruption, and incompetence.”<sup>6</sup> Dictators in some cases “are simply uninterested in economic development and the welfare of their citizens,” while in other cases “autocrats have some interest in developing their country but they subordinate it to other interests that not only compromise their socioeconomic policies but undermine any serious pursuit of the rule of law.”<sup>7</sup>

The reason Carothers gives for why most autocrats are not good state builders and often fail to produce economic growth is that doing so entails measures that are threatening to the regime’s power. Independent judiciaries and other “essential components of the rule of law restrict or remove the tools that autocrats typically employ to control political life and stay in power.”<sup>8</sup> Constructing a well-functioning state involves building a government apparatus that has the capacity to “develop, legislate, and implement effective policies,” and as such “is independent in important ways from the political levers of power and therefore naturally threatening to an autocratic leader.”<sup>9</sup> Carothers does admit that these issues do not necessarily preclude autocrats from building effective states and fostering economic growth, but he holds them up as reasons why sequentialists are wrong to assume autocratic regimes are better at these

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 19.

activities than democracies. Democracy, he says, are intertwined with the rule of law, and are naturally impelled to produce economic growth for the welfare of their citizens. Because of this, “[i]t is no coincidence that almost all of the most effective states in the world today are in democratic countries,” and in light of this fact democratization and modernization should be pursued at the same time “with an effort to find points of complementarity and mutual reinforcement.”<sup>10</sup> While most of the foreign policy elites examined in this paper at least appear to advocate a simultaneous approach to democratization, others, like Zakaria and to a lesser extent Kissinger, argue in favor of greater authority rather than democracy in order to foster economic growth and build stronger states. It is to these opinion leaders’ arguments that Carothers’ critique is most relevant.

The last approach that is subject to rigorous academic criticism is rationalism. Because rational choice is a widespread concept in political science, economics, and other disciplines, it is the target of frequent attacks and challenges. A common complaint can be found in Barry’s analysis of democratic theories. He argued that economic explanations for the behavior of a large collectivity—such as game theoretic models—are inevitably going to be too abstract or simplified to be applied to the complexities of the real world.<sup>11</sup> However, he acknowledged that even with this drawback, rationalism is capable of explaining a great deal. Barry’s second criticism is more problematic for the economic approach. He argued that while rational choice theory may be able to describe how political actors behave, it cannot explain why they have certain interests rather than others. As he wrote, “there are no interesting deductions to be drawn from the interaction of given ‘tastes’ in a market...The question is how that taste arises, and this

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>11</sup> See Barry, *Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy*, 46.

is a question that cannot be answered within the ‘economic’ framework.”<sup>12</sup> In regards to democratic reform (or lack thereof), the economic approach stresses that the level of democratization depends on the rational decisions of actors in a country. The main thrust of Barry’s complaint is that the economic approach does not explain the origins of these actors’ preferences, and therefore is not a fully adequate framework for understanding why we see liberal democracy in some places but not others.

In addition to criticizing the rational choice approach as a whole, Barry paid particular attention to the theory of Lipset regarding co-optation of old dominating strata, attacking the position that in some instances it is important for democratic reform movements to preserve vestiges of the *ancien régime* in order to preserve stability.<sup>13</sup> In regard to Lipset’s observation that many of the world’s stable democracies have preserved the monarchies of the old system, Barry asked, “Would it shake New Zealand, Canada, Australia, Sweden, Norway, Denmark (or even Britain!) to the core politically not to be monarchies?”<sup>14</sup> Implicit in this criticism is the observation that other stable democracies, like France and the United States, rejected most of the old order’s social structures. However, though Barry made a strong point in this regard, his critique is not entirely fair. While it is almost certainly true that preserving monarchies in today’s democracies is not necessary for stability, this may not have been the case when these countries were making the transition to democracy.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>13</sup> Barry treats this theory as belonging to the sociological school. However, since it is better seen as a rationalist idea in the context of democratic transitions, I include this critique with Barry’s other criticisms of rational choice theory.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 73.

### ***Predictions and Results: How the Approaches Have Fared***

The experience of Iraq has provided an almost unprecedented opportunity to see how different ways of understanding and applying principles of democratization actually work in reality. By looking at the evidence of the last four years, it is possible to see how each of the four approaches have withstood real-world application and thereby detect their weaknesses and strengths apart from theoretical critiques.

The U.S. involvement in Iraq has taught us the most about the democratic universalist approach. As shown previously, universalists predicted that once Iraqi society was liberated from Saddam Hussein's tyranny they would naturally gravitate toward democratic government. This vision, however, has been marred by the collapse of the Iraqi state, the Sunni insurgency, and sectarian violence. Rather than showing enthusiasm for a unified democracy, many Iraqis have instead assigned their loyalties to religious, tribal, and ethnic groups fighting for a share of power and even domination of the country. The rise of militias, especially Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi army, is strongly indicative of a lack of commitment among Iraq's elites to democratic power-sharing and the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the political arena. Even many members of Iraq's new government, and their political parties, are backed by militias. Furthermore, the fact that Iraq has drafted and ratified a permanent constitution should not be used as evidence that Iraqis naturally prefer democracy—the United States would have had it no other way. The question one must ask is how long the constitution will last when the United States eventually withdraws its troops.

Thus, the evidence of the last four years suggests that democratic universalism is not credible as an approach to understanding where democracy comes from—democracy has clearly not been the default option for a people liberated from autocratic rule. However, there have been

some glimmers of hope for this approach. One was the remarkably high voter turnout in Iraq's general election in December 2005. Both Shi'a and Sunni voters stood in long lines to choose their representatives, showing that they can indeed express their preferences peacefully in the political sphere. Another glimmer of hope was the insistence of the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani to hold direct elections rather than the caucuses preferred by the CPA. Al-Sistani—who actually holds Iranian citizenship, but may be considered a member of Iraq's elite because of his large following—has been a consistent advocate for democratic governance, arguing that democracy and Islam are compatible. However, elections are not everything in democracy. What matters just as much is a commitment to respect the results of elections, and to pursue objectives through the ballot box and constitutional procedures rather than through force.

The political culture approach has fared slightly better than democratic universalism. U.S. foreign policy elites like Larry Diamond predicted that democracy could only survive in Iraq if the country underwent serious social and cultural change. Thus far, it appears that this has not happened. The rise of militias, the thirst for domination and revenge among elites, and the intense attachment of individuals to subgroups within Iraqi society indicate that the democratic values of trust and peaceful resolution of disputes are not widely held. As Diamond says, “We have to ask why different groups had more commitment to their sect or community than to the Iraqi state, why there was so little trust, so much anger and brutality.”<sup>15</sup> Though the experience does highlight the importance of understanding the values and attitudes of Iraqi society, it does not necessarily validate the sociological approach's tenet that culture is at the crux of democratization. As Barry points out in his critique of cultural arguments, the causal relationship between values and democracy is not at all clear. Correlation does not necessarily imply causation. Therefore, it is possible that culture may simply be an intervening variable, and

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<sup>15</sup> Larry Diamond, email interview by the author, February 5, 2007.

that there is another determining factor of greater interest to the question of democratic transition and consolidation in Iraq.

Sequentialism has also seen apparent vindication by the Iraqi experience. Since the chaos and violence following the U.S. invasion and the collapse of the Iraqi state, no other aspect of democratization has been more emphasized among commentators than the importance of state development and monopoly of force. Rampant insecurity and continuing sectarian violence make it very difficult to convince Iraqi ethnic, tribal, and religious groups that they can trust one another and work together in a democracy. The sequentialist approach is only partially validated, however. Since the security situation has not improved, it is not possible to definitively determine whether doing so will improve the chances for the survival of democracy, or whether another variable is also at work. As for the economic side of the sequentialist argument, the implications are also impossible to tell at this point in time. Only recently has Iraq's oil production begun to increase, and it is not clear how equitably such natural resources will be distributed in the long term. The country's economic growth would also seem to be a good sign from the sequentialist perspective, but the time span for democratic sequences is longer than an analysis of the last four years can allow—it would take quite a while for economic growth to create the middle class that is central to the theory. In short, the jury is still out on whether the sequentialist perspective is validated by the Iraqi experience. Even if economic growth and a better-functioning state do accompany more stable democratic government, Carothers reminds us that these developments may go hand in hand, and not sequentially.

Finally, the rational choice approach to understanding the emergence of democracy faces its most crucial tests in the coming months. The theory predicts that in order for democracy to emerge, Sunni insurgent groups must be convinced that they will not be able to achieve their

goal of subversion and that they will be better off in a democratic system. The U.S. troop surge and its accompanying counterinsurgency strategy may be able to persuade them that resistance will be fruitless, while the recent signing of an oil-sharing agreement between Iraq's ethnic groups may be able to assure them they all will have a fair share of the country's resources. Provisions in the constitution guaranteeing the Sunnis certain posts in the government should also serve to further allay concerns of retribution and oppression. Whether these developments will actually lead to a more stable democracy remain to be seen, however.

One important shortcoming to Noah Feldman and Larry Diamond's application of rational choice theory to Iraq is their exclusive focus on the Sunnis. While the insurgency is a crucial actor in deciding the stability of the Iraqi political order, according to the rationalist approach *all* the relevant groups must see democracy as being in their best interests. This means that the Shi'a as well as the Sunni must be convinced that they cannot use force as a means of achieving what they want, and that pursuing their interests through democratic procedures is better for them. The Shi'a especially must not believe that they can dominate the country and use the state as their instrument of retribution. To do so would undermine other groups' faith in the benefit of participating in the political system, and would thus unravel the fledgling democracy. A second problem with rationalist arguments in general is that while they may be useful in explaining how groups decide to stop fighting each other and settle on sharing power in a democracy, they may not be as useful in explaining the endurance of democracy. Are groups constantly calculating the costs and benefits of continued participation, or do elites eventually become habituated to the democratic process? In other words, at some point do cultural values come into play so that democracy becomes a self-perpetuating system? A third problem is the question of how groups determine their preferences. For example, if the Sunni insurgents



believe their ethnic group to be naturally superior to the Shi'a and Kurds, might that alter the calculation what goals they think are attainable? In this way, cultural or religious values may interfere with the raw interests assumed to dictate actions according to the rational actor model. That rational choice theories and contemporary foreign policy elites do not say much about these questions is a serious strike against the rationalist approach.

## CONCLUSION

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The project to build a democracy in Iraq is still young by historical standards, and so it is difficult to determine the full effects of the application of the four theoretical approaches to actual policy. Furthermore, because U.S. foreign policy is never fully unified in motivation or execution, the efforts in Iraq have represented a mix of the various approaches, making it still more difficult to definitively determine their respective consequences. Nevertheless, it is useful to attempt a consideration of what the experience in Iraq up to this point can tell us about the validity of each theory. It is also definitely worthwhile to identify what theoretical approaches American opinion leaders have implied in their contributions to the intellectual foreign policy debate on Iraq's democratization. Such an understanding will facilitate future evaluations of the usefulness of each theoretical approach, and will provide counsel to those considering similar projects for democracy.

Even though it will require many more years and in-depth studies to definitively determine what theoretical approaches were best supported by the case of Iraq, there is one lesson of which we can be certain—how little we actually know about how democracy comes into being and what makes it last. Despite numerous cases of both successful and abortive attempts at democratization in the last thirty years, we have a long way to go before we have anything resembling a solid understanding of it. However, even if we do gain a deeper knowledge of the processes and mechanisms that lead to stable democracy, it is not clear that democratization will ever be any easier. Indeed, every stable democracy has experienced periods of wrenching social disruption and violence, and there are good arguments as to why such agony

may in fact be an integral part of democratization.<sup>1</sup> Paradoxically, it may be this relationship between democracy and violence that leaves us with the best reason to have hope for Iraq—even if the experience so far has been bloody and violent, there is cause to believe that an Iraqi democracy may still eventually develop out of the current predicament.

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of several such arguments, see Daniel Ziblatt, “How Did Europe Democratize?” *World Politics* 58, no. 2 (January 2006): 311-338; also see Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

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