

IRAQ 2012: WHAT CAN IT LOOK LIKE? HOW DO WE GET THERE?

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IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE A SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN 2012 AND BEYOND, IRAQ NEEDS TO PUT IN PLACE A VIABLE FEDERAL SYSTEM. AT THE OUTSET, THE IRAQI CONSTITUTION DEFINES IRAQ AS A "SINGLE INDEPENDENT FEDERAL STATE." SUBSEQUENTLY, IT CARVES OUT A POLITICAL SYSTEM THAT BROADLY SHARES DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY AMONG MULTIPLE TIERS OF GOVERNMENT. GREAT STRIDES HAVE YET TO BE MADE, HOWEVER, BEFORE THIS SYSTEM IS REALIZED IN PRACTICE.

FEDERALISM IS NOT ONLY AN APPROPRIATE POLITICAL SYSTEM FOR IRAQ, BUT A VITAL ONE WITH WHICH TO BUILD PEACE IN THE COUNTRY. FEDERALISM IS NOT PARTITION. NOR, IS FEDERALISM NECESSARILY THE FIRST STEP ON A SHORT ROAD TOWARD PARTITION. ON THE CONTRARY, FEDERALISM CAN BE A CRUCIAL TOOL FOR AVOIDING STATE DISSOLUTION IN IRAQ.

WHY IS FEDERALISM AN APPROPRIATE SYSTEM FOR IRAQ? FEDERALISM CAN PROMOTE PEACE BY MOVING ISSUES THAT ARE POTENTIAL SOURCES OF CONFLICT FROM THE NATIONAL SPHERE TO THE SUBNATIONAL LEVEL, WHERE GROUPS CAN DECIDE THESE MATTERS ON THEIR OWN. AT THE SUBNATIONAL LEVEL, GROUPS CAN TAILOR POLICIES THAT MEET THEIR SPECIFIC NEEDS AND GOALS, ALLOWING FOR WHAT FORMER PRESIDENT CLINTON HAS DESCRIBED AS THE "THE BEST OF ALL WORLDS."¹

WHY DOESN'T FEDERALISM NECESSARILY LEAD TO SEPARATISM? FEDERALISM ALLOWS GROUPS TO BENEFIT FROM BEING A MEMBER OF A LARGER STATE, WHICH MAY INCLUDE, AS THE IRAQI CONSTITUTION STIPULATES, BORDER PROTECTION AND REVENUE-SHARING, WHILE STILL EXERTING CONTROL OVER ISSUES THAT ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO THEM.

NEVERTHELESS, THE EFFECT OF FEDERALISM ON IRAQ WILL NOT NECESSARILY BE IMMEDIATE. INITIALLY, FEDERALISM WILL BE CHARACTERIZED BY A LOT OF PUSH AND PULL AS IRAQIS STRUGGLE TO FIND THE APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF DECENTRALIZATION FOR THEIR COUNTRY. THIS PUSH AND PULL WILL LIKELY BE PRESENT FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE ALTHOUGH PROBABLY NOT WITH AS MUCH INTENSITY. FEDERALISM'S FLEXIBILITY IN THIS RESPECT IS ONE OF ITS KEY STRENGTHS, HOWEVER. A SYSTEM THAT IS NOT FLEXIBLE WILL SNAP UNDER PRESSURE.

I MAKE THESE CLAIMS NOT BASED ON ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE OR A FEW SELECTIVELY CHOSEN CASE STUDIES. INSTEAD, I MAKE THESE CLAIMS BASED ON HARD DATA. IN A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF 50 DEMOCRACIES AROUND THE WORLD OVER NEARLY SIX DECADES, I FIND THAT

¹ FORMER US PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON ONCE STATED THAT "I THINK IF WE WILL KEEP THIS IN MIND - WHAT IS MOST LIKELY TO ADVANCE OUR COMMON HUMANITY IN A SMALL WORLD, AND WHAT IS THE ARRANGEMENT OF GOVERNMENT MOST LIKELY TO GIVE US THE BEST OF ALL WORLDS, THE INTEGRITY WE NEED, THE SELF-GOVERNMENT WE NEED, THE SELF-ADVANCEMENT WE NEED . . . I THINK MORE AND MORE PEOPLE WILL SAY, THIS FEDERALISM, IT'S NOT SUCH A BAD IDEA." SEE EDISON STEWART, 'CLINTON WEIGHS IN WITH PLEA TO QUEBEC,' *TORONTO STAR*, OCTOBER 9, 1999.

DECENTRALIZATION RESULTS IN A 70 PERCENTAGE POINT DECREASE IN ANTI-REGIME REBELLION AND A 44 PERCENTAGE POINT DECREASE IN INTER-COMMUNAL CONFLICT.² I ALSO FIND THAT HAVING MORE EXTENSIVE FORMS OF DECENTRALIZATION DECREASES INTRASTATE CONFLICT OVER LESS EXTENSIVE ONES. THE SPECIFIC AREAS I EXAMINED IN THIS ANALYSIS INCLUDE THE ABILITY OF REGIONS TO RAISE THEIR OWN REVENUE AND EXERT CONTROL OVER EDUCATION AND PUBLIC ORDER OR POLICE.

WHILE THESE NUMBERS MAY SEEM OBTUSE, IN TERMS OF HUMAN LIVES, THEY ARE STARKLY APPARENT. THERE IS ALSO A TENDENCY WHEN YOU HEAR FIGURES LIKE THESE TO CLAIM THAT A PARTICULAR CASE IS UNIQUE AND DOES NOT FIT AN ESTABLISHED MOLD. IT IS TRUE COUNTRIES ARE UNIQUE AND IRAQ IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER COUNTRIES IN MANY RESPECTS. AFTER ALL, IRAQ HAS NO PRIOR HISTORY WITH FEDERALISM. IN FACT, FEDERALISM IS NOT A VERY COMMON PRACTICE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AT ALL, AS MANY CRITICS OF A FEDERAL IRAQ HAVE POINTED OUT.

THE FACT, HOWEVER, THAT IRAQ HAS NO PRIOR HISTORY WITH FEDERALISM, OR THAT FEDERALISM IS AN UNCOMMON FORM OF GOVERNANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST, IS IRRELEVANT TO THIS DISCUSSION. MANY COUNTRIES THAT HAVE VIBRANT DEMOCRACIES TODAY DID NOT HAVE STRONG PRIOR HISTORIES WITH DEMOCRACY. THE SAME IS TRUE OF FEDERALISM. HISTORY MUST BEGIN SOMEWHERE AND IRAQ'S DEMOCRATIC HISTORY MUST BEGIN WITH FEDERALISM.

NOT EVERY VARIANT OF FEDERALISM WILL ENGENDER PEACE IN IRAQ, HOWEVER. FOR FEDERALISM TO BE SUCCESSFUL, THE CENTRAL AUTHORITY MUST NOT BE HOLLOW. IF IT IS, SUB-UNITS OF THE STATE ARE LIKELY TO HAVE VERY LITTLE INCENTIVE TO STAY WITHIN IRAQ.³ THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT MUST ALSO BE INDEPENDENT. THAT IS, IT MUST NOT RELY ON THE GOODWILL OF THE SUB-UNITS TO FUNCTION SINCE THIS GOODWILL IS UNLIKELY TO BE FORTHCOMING. VARIOUS PARTIES WITHIN IRAQ AND THE MIDDLE EAST MORE GENERALLY ARE ALSO UNLIKELY TO ACCEPT THIS SYSTEM IN PRACTICE.

DEVOLVING SPECIFIC POWERS TO THE SUBNATIONAL LEVEL IN IRAQ WILL NOT NECESSARILY LEAD TO PEACE, FOR FEDERALISM IS NOT A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL SYSTEM. WHETHER DEVOLUTION OF CERTAIN POWERS ENCOURAGES PEACE, IS LIKELY TO DEPEND ON THE PARTICULAR DEMANDS OF THE IRAQI PEOPLE. DEVOLVING AUTHORITY IN AREAS NOT SOLICITED BY SPECIFIC GROUPS IS UNLIKELY TO CONTRIBUTE TO A STABLE IRAQ.

² THESE FIGURES ARE BASED ON A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF ANTI-REGIME REBELLION AND INTER-COMMUNAL CONFLICT IN DAWN BRANCATI, FORTHCOMING, *PEACE BY DESIGN: MANAGING INTRASTATE CONFLICT THROUGH DECENTRALIZATION* (OXFORD, U.K.: OXFORD UP). THE MODELS INCLUDE VARIABLES FOR DECENTRALIZATION, REGIONAL PARTY VOTE, POLITICAL AND CIVIL RIGHTS, TYPE OF ELECTORAL SYSTEM, AGE OF DEMOCRACY, ETHNO-LINGUISTIC HETEROGENEITY AND GDP. THE MODELS SHOW THAT HOLDING EVERY VARIABLE BUT DECENTRALIZATION AT ITS MEAN, THAT DECENTRALIZATION DECREASES ANTI-REGIME REBELLION BY 0.70 POINTS AND DECREASES INTER-COMMUNAL CONFLICT BY 0.44 POINTS. DIFFERENT MODELS YIELD DIFFERENT FIGURES ALTHOUGH ACROSS MODELS, THE EFFECT OF DECENTRALIZATION IS STRONGLY SIGNIFICANT.

³ TYPICALLY, CENTRAL GOVERNMENTS HAVE JURISDICTION -- SINGULAR OR SHARED WITH REGIONAL AUTHORITIES -- OVER ISSUES THAT AFFECT A COUNTRY AS A WHOLE OR ISSUES THAT SUBUNITS OF A STATE CANNOT PROVIDE FOR INDIVIDUALLY.

ONLY A FEDERAL SYSTEM, MOREOVER, THAT BUILDS TIES ACROSS SUBUNITS OF THE STATE AND ACROSS ETHNO-LINGUISTIC AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS WILL PROMOTE PEACE IN IRAQ. FEDERALISM REQUIRES COOPERATION AMONG SUB-UNITS OF A STATE, BUT IT DOES NOT NECESSARILY ENCOURAGE IT. COOPERATION MUST, THEREFORE, BE INCENTIVIZED. IN OTHER WORDS, COOPERATION MUST BE BUILT INTO THE SYSTEM. THIS IS PARTICULARLY THE CASE IN TERMS OF OIL REVENUE SHARING.

THE PARTY SYSTEM, I BELIEVE, IS KEY IN THIS REGARD. PARTY SYSTEMS MUST BE OVERARCHING. THAT IS, THEY MUST FULLY INCORPORATE PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT REGIONS AND ETHNO-LINGUISTIC AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS. PARTIES IN A CONFLICT SITUATION, SUCH AS IN IRAQ, MAY NOT NATURALLY EVOLVE THIS WAY. THE SYSTEM MUST, THEREFORE, REQUIRE IT LEGISLATIVELY.

IN THE SAME 50 COUNTRY STUDY OF FEDERALISM I'VE ALREADY MENTIONED, I FOUND THAT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FEDERALISM IN REDUCING CONFLICT IS SEVERELY CURTAILED WHEN THE PARTY SYSTEM IS DOMINATED BY REGIONAL PARTIES. REGIONAL PARTIES FOCUS ON WHAT IS IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THEIR GROUP AND NOT NECESSARILY WHAT IS IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE, OR THAT OF OTHER GROUPS. AS SUCH, REGIONAL PARTIES CAN BE A MAJOR HINDRANCE TO PEACE.

IT IS FOOLHARDY TO BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT FEDERALISM ALONE CAN ENGENDER PEACE IN IRAQ. FEDERALISM WILL NOT BRING THE WAR IN IRAQ TO AN END. THE WAR MUST FIRST END FOR FEDERALISM TO OPERATE EFFECTIVELY. FEDERALISM MUST ALSO BE BUTTRESSED BY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND A STABLE SECURITY FORCE THAT ACTS AS A DETERRENT TO VIOLENCE. THIS IS PARTICULARLY PROBLEMATIC IF THE US PULLS OUT OF IRAQ BEFORE STABILITY IS ACHIEVED AND KEY STRUCTURES ARE IN PLACE.

IN ORDER TO REALIZE THESE GOALS, FEDERALISM NEEDS THE SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE US, AS CALLED FOR IN THE BIDEN-BROWNBACK AMENDMENT. THE US, OF COURSE, SHOULD NOT IMPOSE A FEDERAL SYSTEM ON IRAQ. BUT, THE BIDEN-BROWNBACK PLAN DOES NOT CALL FOR SUCH ACTION. US ENCOURAGEMENT IS NEEDED TO OVERCOME CLASSIC COMMITMENT PROBLEMS. THAT IS, IN ORDER TO REALIZE FEDERALISM, PARTIES MUST SHARE POWER AND TRUST THAT THE OTHER SIDE WILL SHARE POWER AS WELL. HOWEVER, SINCE ONE PARTY MAY SHIRK, OTHER PARTIES MAY BE RELUCTANT TO COMMIT TO FEDERALISM IN THE FIRST PLACE. THUS, A THIRD PARTY, LIKE THE US, IS NEEDED TO ENSURE THAT BOTH PARTIES COMMIT TO FEDERALISM AND TAKE ACTION AGAINST VIOLATIONS OF THIS SYSTEM.

WHILE IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO KNOW WHAT WILL BEFALL IRAQ IN THE LEAD UP TO 2012, EXTANT KNOWLEDGE SUGGESTS THAT EVEN WITH FEDERALISM THE CURRENT PROGNOSIS FOR IRAQ LOOKS BLEAK. WITHOUT FEDERALISM, HOWEVER, THE PROGNOSIS LOOKS EVEN BLEAKER.