

Chapter 12

Enforcing Central Authority: Nuri al-Maliki and the Tradition of Iraq's Authoritarian State

Hauke Feickert

Center for Near- and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS), Germany

ABSTRACT

This article brings together historical and political research in order to give an account of Iraq's recurring authoritarianism. Focusing on the agency of three distinct state elites, it will compare how these networks used cooptation and coercion to dominate their respective political arena. As a part of this, structural aspects like the allurements of the centralized state economic and the aspect of Western assistance in the (re)building of a central authority will join the analysis. However, the article will be primarily concerned with Iraqi politicians, their authorship of authoritarianism, their efforts to build a "modern" nation and their attempts to overrule dissent. The main interest of this inquiry is for the present and recent past: As Iraq has shaken off the oppression of 35 years of dictatorship, the new democratic system has shown to be extremely susceptible for a renewal of the authoritarian tradition.

INTRODUCTION

In April 2014 Nuri al-Maliki campaigned as Iraq's strongman and led his "State of Law" alliance to victory in the national elections. While many had called him a tyrant, incapable of uniting a divided country, Iraq's prime minister obviously had not lost his appeal: Gathering 24% of the vote, his party became the strongest force in parliament. Especially in the Shia-Arab community of the south many had subscribed to his call for a new

majority government, stronger, more efficient, and free from quarrels with the other parties of the outgoing national unity coalition. Right after the results were published Maliki called on various smaller entities to rally behind him, threatening thereby to divide his opponents and to exclude prominent politicians from the Sunni-Arab and Sunni-Kurdish constituencies. After eight years in power Maliki's party now seemed close to gain absolute control over the state. Indeed, many scholars had predicted this new Iraqi authoritarian-

ism, as Maliki had sidelined the constitution and outmaneuvered parliamentary opposition for years (Dodge 2013; Rayburn 2014; Visser 2010). Building a considerable network of support, Maliki had increasingly answered demands for power-sharing, protests against corruption and calls for provincial autonomy with force. However, all of Maliki's efforts were crushed in June of 2014, when the government lost control over the city of Mosul to the jihadist group "Islamic State". Public opinion turned sharply against the prime minister, who had to step down within weeks. Nevertheless, many observers have been arguing that a mere change in personal would not be enough to protect Iraqis from a transgressive state (Russel & Sambanis 2014). For as much as the recent rise in authoritarianism has been caused by the now dismissed prime minister, its roots can be traced back to a particular perseverance of elite politics. Joining this debate, the present article seeks to analyze and compare how various political elites in the history of the country envisioned Iraq's central state as the essential tool for social unification and economic modernization.

BACKGROUND

The article will use the classical definition of authoritarianism by Juan Linz to review the rule of the three elitist social groups who shaped Iraq in the 20th century (Linz 2000). Drawing on Linz, the article will discuss their claims for legitimacy and analyze their amount of popular support. It will then view the disconnect of the regimes with society and their efforts to control the population. In this part, the weakening of legal and institutional power as well as the recourse to violence will be examined. In the final conclusion, the recurrence of elitist rule and of claims for modernization as well as the persistent significance of cooptation and coercion will be juxtaposed to explain authoritarian instability in Iraq.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

The first period to be discussed will be the Hashemite Monarchy and the rule of the Sharifian Officers (1922-1958). Drawing on the works of Hanna Batatu, Toby Dodge, Peter Sluglett and Charles Tripp the article will focus on how Iraq's Sunni-Arab elite was using the distribution of agricultural wealth as well as British colonial power to realize their vision of a unified central state. This concept quickly became dependent on open violence in order to silence large segments of resistance, in particular among Iraq's Shi'a-Arabs and the Kurds. The article will then move on to the period of the Iraqi Republic under the rule of the Tikriti Ba'ath and the personal dictatorship of Saddam Hussein (1968-2003). It will especially use the works of Eric Davis, Fanar Haddad and Joseph Sassoon to show how the state's new leadership used the recently acquired oil wealth to fulfill past promises of state modernization, but ended up weakening and discrediting the central state by intensifying intercommunal conflicts with Iraq's Shiites and Kurds. In a third part the article will cover contemporary politics, analyzing the new Iraqi Republic's development under Nuri al-Maliki and the rise of the Da'awa Malikiyyoon (2006-2014). In particular the works by Toby Dodge, Joel Rayburn and Raidar Visser will be assembled here to give an account of how the new power elite abandoned the idea of a coalition government, representing all communities of society, to revive a strong central state in an effort to enforce unity under Shia-Arab leadership.

THE RISE OF IRAQ'S AUTHORITARIAN STATE

Claims for Legitimacy

In 1921 the British government allowed the Hashemite Prince Faisal Ibn Husain to become king of the new state of Iraq. The new ruler, a son of the

18 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/enforcing-central-authority/142253

Related Content

Harnessing the Demographic Dividend in Africa Through Lessons From East Asia's Experience

Ehizuelen Michael Mitchell Omoruyi (2021). *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* (pp. 1-38).

www.irma-international.org/article/harnessing-the-demographic-dividend-in-africa-through-lessons-from-east-asias-experience/279130

The India against Corruption Movement

M. V. Rajeev Gowda and Purnima Prakash (2014). *Handbook of Research on Political Activism in the Information Age* (pp. 240-257).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-india-against-corruption-movement/110682

Towards E-Government Information Platforms for Enterprise 2.0

Mário Rodrigues, Gonçalo Paiva Dias and António Teixeira (2016). *Politics and Social Activism: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 467-486).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/towards-e-government-information-platforms-for-enterprise-20/139982

World of Uncertainty: How New Media Affects Communication on a Global Level and Required Adjustment to Expertise

(2021). *Universal Codes of Media in International Political Communications: Emerging Research and Opportunities* (pp. 83-95).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/world-of-uncertainty/267800

The Future of the European Union in the Framework of Globalization

Ebru Nergiz (2014). *Globalization and Governance in the International Political Economy* (pp. 184-196).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-future-of-the-european-union-in-the-framework-of-globalization/94328