FROM FORCED REVOLUTION TO FAILED TRANSITION: THE NIGHTMARISH AGENCY OF REVOLUTIONARY NEO-LIBERALISM IN IRAQ

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Abstract:

This essay explores the agency of efforts to advance the market, and apply techniques of constitutional engineering, as agents of liberal change in post-war Iraq. By revealing the interests, repertoires of coercion, and taken for granted assumptions about the political world brought to bear within these projects, it identifies their culpability in generating the current malaise. The essay also goes deeper to address the issue of how contemporary narratives of global transition and newness articulated a vision of the Iraqi regime as a focus of efforts at transformation. I suggest that this vision—and the projects of forced revolution and transition that were built upon it—was seductive more by virtue of its internal logic than by virtue of real insight into the Iraqi condition. Ultimately, the outcomes of the projects of revolutionary neo-liberalism and transition in Iraq require that we do more than point to US blunders of implementation or the cultural failings of the Iraqis; they should force us to consider the limitations of advancing the market and transition methodology as techniques for understanding and acting upon the political world.

Keywords: Iraq, transition, neoliberalism.

Resumen:

Este artículo explora los esfuerzos realizados para fomentar el mercado y aplicar técnicas de ingeniería constitucional como medios para el cambio liberal en el Irak de posguerra. Al identificar los intereses, tácticas de coerción e ideas previamente asumidas acerca del entorno político en el que se han aplicado estos proyectos, se identifica su culpabilidad en la generación de la situación actual. El articulo profundiza además en como las narrativas contemporáneas de la transición global y de su carácter novedoso articularon una visión del régimen iraquí como fuente de esfuerzos de transformación. Sugiero que esta visión, y los proyectos de revolución y transición forzadas que se basaron en ella, era más atractiva por su lógica interna que por una apreciación realista de la situación en Irak. En ultima instancia, los resultados de los proyectos de neoliberalismo revolucionario y transición en Irak requerirán que hagamos algo mas que señalar los fallos de EE.UU. al implementarlos o las carencias culturales de los iraquíes; estos deberían hacernos considerar las limitaciones de fomentar el mercado y la metodología de transición como técnicas para comprender y actuar sobre el mundo político.

Palabras clave: Irak, transición, neoliberalismo.

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Introduction

"What an enormous price man had to pay for…those grand human prerogatives and cultural showpieces! How much blood and horror lies behind all 'good things'!"

Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*

If weapons of mass destruction provided a pretext for the March 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq, then policymakers in Washington and London quickly signaled that democratic transition, culminating in freely contested national elections, would provide the eventual endgame of Iraq's forced revolution. This was in keeping with the spirit of the Bush Administration's revolutionary *National Security Strategy* document of 2002, which advocated "coercive democratization as a solution to Middle East terrorism"[2]. On the ground in Iraq, however, the democratization agenda was initially subordinated to efforts at reconfiguring the economic arena through a series of radical market "reforms"[3]. Where Pentagon planners saw war as a necessary instrument of regime collapse, they advanced the market both as a blueprint for the constitution of a new order, and as a strategic asset that could be used to mobilize coalitions in support of their policies. In short, a new Iraq complete with the trimmings of liberal democracy would be founded upon the moral pedagogy of the proverbial free market, with well-placed segments of corporate America delegated a peculiarly revolutionary role. Once open to the agency and logic of market forces, Iraq—by virtue of its potential wealth—would be inundated with actors bearing norms and practices that would recast political subjectivities, and rearticulate configurations of interest, that had been corrupted by decades of statist hegemony. Neo-liberal adjustment would empower private agencies capable of both holding back the reemergence of an activist Iraqi state, and advancing US interests both in Iraq and the region at large. This was, in any case, the idea.

By late 2003, it was clear to all but the most diehard of Bush Administration supporters that the situation in Iraq was tipping towards crisis. Whereas Pentagon planners had initially rejected all but the most minimalist efforts at nation-building (a term which they publicly derided),[4] experts in constitutional and electoral engineering—armed with nearly two decades worth of research into democratic transitions in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and East Asia—were now brought to Iraq as technicians of the new order, their job being to engineer an institutional framework that might stabilize the political environment and reconfirm the

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[2] Nye, Joseph S. Jr.: "Transformational Leadership and US Grand Strategy", *Foreign Affairs* 85(4), (July-August 2006), p. 139.

[3] Looney, Robert: "Post-War Iraq's Financial System: Building from Scratch", *Middle East Policy* vol. 12, no. 1 (Spring 2005). Looney Robert: "The Neo-liberal Model's Planned Role in Iraq's Economic Transition", *Middle East Journal 57* (4), (Autumn 2003), pp. 568-586. Klein, Naomi: "Baghdad Year Zero" *Harper's Magazine* (September 2004). Crocker, Bathsheba: "Reconstructing Iraq's Economy", *Washington Quarterly* 27(4) (Autumn 2004), pp. 73-93.According to Crocker "what made the CPA's efforts radical was its unusually early attention to reforming Iraq's financial sector and creating a business-friendly investment climate as well as the fact that it imposed significant legal reforms as an occupying power without the involvement of a legitimate Iraqi government."

[4] Packer, George (2005): *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq.* New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, p.114. "In mid-February 2003, Rumsfeld gave a speech in New York entitled 'Beyond Nation Building.' The postwar reconstructions of the 1990s had bred a culture of dependency, he said, and Iraq would follow a new model—the minimalist approach of the United States in Afghanistan".

legitimacy of the project.[5] One prominent transitologist, reflecting the optimistic, can-do spirit of the transitions project as a whole, justified his participation in Iraq on the basis of his conviction that—via the application of principles divined from the systematic study of democratic transitions elsewhere—it would be possible to demonstrate that "the social soil of [Iraq]…had not been turned irretrievably into desert. It could be irrigated and brought back"[6]. When elections were finally held—first on 30 January 2005 to choose a Transitional National Authority (TNA) from which a committee would be drawn to draft a national constitution, and again on 15 December 2005 to elect the Council of Representatives (CoR) whose governing mandate would extend to four years—policymakers indeed responded as if they had made a desert bloom.[7] American and British officials pointed to the purple fingers of smiling, dancing, and weeping Iraqis to suggest the underlying success of their project.[8] The mere fact that elections occurred at all was offered as vindication of an increasingly unpopular policy. Iraqis were now, in the official view, marching along the teleological path of democratic transition opened by military intervention. All that remained was for Iraq's sovereign government to finish negotiating details of the new constitutional framework, and the "mission accomplished" banner might once again be unfurled.

While the former vision is no doubt more controversial than the latter, both draw from the same well of contemporary globalism. Both present themselves as carving out channels that would open Iraq to—and calibrate its domestic political and economic institutions with—global flows of liberal transition and newness. Both see their efforts as productive of effects that can be understood and measured with reference to taken for granted boundaries of national economy and domestic political system. And both are imbued with the contemporary myths of good governance. In other words, each project represents itself as the politically neutral application of appropriate principles of managerial government and established best practice. By virtue of this normative maneuver, projects of rearranging the calculative frames and agencies of political and economic life are presented as mere reform; reform that by virtue of its appeal to universal principles must be prior too, and thus placed beyond the scope of, democratic contestation. Accordingly, an army of economic consultants, advisors, and corporate agents arrived almost together with US troops to begin the task of reassembling Iraq's political and economic infrastructure. The supposed neutrality of these experts afforded policymakers with a degree of plausible deniability: by ostensibly leaving the problem of institutional design over to academics and experts—actors supposedly only interested in appropriate technical solutions to the problems of governance—advocates of forced revolution could present their project as advancing no interests other than those of its designated recipients (i.e., the Iraqis). And insofar as these projects advanced universally sanctioned ideas and norms, eventual outcomes of the "process" could be presented as the responsibility of the Iraqis themselves.[9] Against this backdrop, elections and the other

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[5] The renewed focus on advancing a constitutional framework for democratic transition also reflected calls from more pragmatic corners of the Bush Administration to get the UN constructively involved in Iraq.

[6] Diamond, Larry (2006): *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq,* New York: Owl Books, p. 3. Diamond is an influential scholar of democratic transition who served as the Coalition Provisional Authority's "Senior Advisor on Governance" from December 2003 to August 2004. The "senior advisor" title was one that he gave himself , Diamond, *op.cit.*, p. 74).

[7] A referendum on the draft constitution was squeezed in between these dates, on 15 October 2005.

[8] Upon casting their votes, Iraqis were required to dip a finger in a pot of indelible purple ink in order to ensure that no one entered the polling booths more than once.

[9] The emphasis on "process" here is significant because of its centrality in the discourse: it suggests that with the appropriate technical fix in place, and virtuous leadership (i.e., skilled management), actors will by virtue of their own reason adjust to the universal principles proclaimed by theory. The reference to a *process* of transition or democratization disguises the sometimes contradictory effects of material efforts that seek to advance and articulate calculative agencies in line with particular political interests and visions.

desiderata of transition are similarly represented as external to, and hence untainted by, the projects of war and neo-liberal adjustment in Iraq. Indeed, elections were advanced to naturalize and validate this project, situating it within a wider narrative of global transition that—like projects of modernization, development, and globalization more generally—presents itself not only as politically neutral but historically inevitable.[10]

Most studies assessing the potential for democratic transition in Iraq either concentrate on variables that suggest Iraq's receptiveness (or lack thereof) to historical processes of global transition and newness, or on the tactical and technical blunders made by US authorities. Dawisha[11], for example, concentrates on the recovery of a "usable past" that might be mobilized in the service of establishing a field upon which to build democratic institutions. Others focus on the role of nationalism and its implications for political visions of the relationship between state and market. This essay, by contrast, explores the actual agency of efforts to advance the market, and apply techniques of constitutional engineering, as agents of transition and newness in Iraq. By revealing the interests and repertoires of coercion brought to bear within these projects, it identifies their culpability in generating the current malaise. In the first section below, I sketch the contours of the revolutionary neo-liberal project in Iraq, and point to some of the more salient consequences of its application, the most general of these being the division of the political world into self-reliant consumers of public goods on the one hand, and communities of residual political sentiment on the other, both of which are encouraged to articulate political demands outside the framework of citizenship. I then look at efforts to advance a constitutional framework of transition, and its role in consolidating ethno-sectarianism as the key organizing principle of political life beyond the market. In conclusion, I suggest that part of the explanation for outcomes in Iraq results from the misrecognition of "the regime" that was the object of efforts at change: a vision that by insisting on viewing the political world in terms of dichotomous spheres of state vs. market, endogenous vs. exogenous, authoritarianism v. democracy misrepresented the complexity of the Saddamist order. Efforts to understand Iraqi political life by projecting outcomes against the myths and methodology of global transition ultimately erected a stereotype of "the Arab regime" that continues to get in the way of understanding the forces that are manifesting themselves violently in the new order[12]. In short, I suggest that the Saddamist regime was less a hardened social artifact produced by decades of state violence and socioeconomic domination, as is usually asserted, than an effect of a particular way of viewing, thinking about, and measuring change in the political world.

1. "Freedom is messy": calculative agency and the moral pedagogy of the market

In May 2003, Paul Bremer declared Iraq "open for business." While obscured by the hoopla concerning Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, economic incentives were central to US

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[10] When we evaluate outcomes and measure change with reference to universal claims, we are inclined to explain deviant outcomes with reference to failures of implementation, or the cultural defects of social objects. The claim to universality obscures power relations and normative assumptions that intervene to shape the ways in which we apprehend and set out to act upon the political world.

[11] Dawisha, Adeed: "The Prospects for Democracy in Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities", *Third World Quarterly* 26 (4-5), (2005), pp. 723-737.

[12] Parker, Christopher : "Insurgency and the Political Shaping of Markets: The Dialectics of Iraq's Forced Revolution", working paper presented at *The Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near East Studies, Spring Research Workshop Series* 27 (February 2006).

efforts to build a coalition in favour of its Iraq policy in advance of the war. The prize was access to the Iraqi market.[13] There were lucrative reconstruction contracts to be had in the short term; and opportunities to consolidate a position in a potentially wealthy, oil driven consumer market over the long term. Predicting $50-100 billion in oil revenues in the first two to three years after Saddam's fall, Paul Wolfowitz drew a picture of a self-financing transformation.[14] Iraqis would greet US soldiers with flowers in the streets of Baghdad. US firms (particularly, of course, firms like Halliburton and Bectel with close ties to the Bush Administration) and well connected businessmen and industrialists in the Middle East stood to do particularly well by the deal; as did actors who had ties with prominent Iraqi exiles favored in Washington. The most visible losers were European firms—primarily Russian and French—who had worked behind the scenes over the previous decade to secure redevelopment contracts and concessions from the Iraqi government.[15] Amongst those who stood the most to loose—almost certainly the biggest losers—were economic actors inside Iraq itself.[16]

As Klein[17] notes, contrary to popular perception, the Bush Administration did have a plan for Iraq: "put simply, it was to lay out as much honey as possible, then sit back and wait for the flies" … "in keeping with the belief that private companies are more suited than governments for virtually every task, the White House decided to privatize the task of privatizing Iraq's [supposedly] state dominated economy."

"Two months before the war began, USAID began drafting a work order, to be handed out to a private company, to oversee Iraq's 'transition to a sustainable market-driven economic system' The document states that the winning company (which turned out to be KPMG offshoot Bearing Point) will take 'appropriate advantage of the unique opportunity for rapid progress in the area presented by the current configuration of political circumstances'. Which is precisely what happened"[18].

But first the vestiges of the previous order would first be wiped away. Implementation began in earnest already in March 2003, with the bombing by US forces of the Ministry of Planning in Baghdad. On 15 May, only three days after arriving in Baghdad, Bremer disbanded the 400,000 strong Iraqi Army, and issued a "de-Ba'thification" order that banned some 30-50 thousand civil servants from future government employment. Saddam's bureaucrats were replaced with an army of consultants and economic advisors, who arrived on the heels of US forces. On 22 May, the United Nations Security Council issued resolution 1483, formally recognizing the United States and the United Kingdom as occupying powers in Iraq. Echoing language used by the League of Nations in mandating administrative control of Iraq to Great Britain some eighty years previously, the resolution called on the US and UK

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[13] Ironically—insofar as this understanding manifested itself in the case of Iraq—the neo-cons were following a trend set up by the Clinton who used access to the US market as a strategic asset in its efforts to advance his administration's policies in the Middle East.

[14] The origins of this figure are mysterious, as oil revenues in 1989—the year before the imposition of sanctions—did not top $16 billion. This is the basis of claims that US officials were planning to ratchet up oil production, essentially turning Iraq into a private pumping station.

[15] It should be noted that some US firms already had interests in Iraq by virtue of their working through European or Middle East-based intermediaries.

[16] This holds not just for the *qitaat al-hisar* ("cats of the embargo") and the tribal shaykhs ostensibly in charge of regulating local access to land, but also to all those whose livelihood was articulated to the distributed architecture of accumulation and authority that suggest obtained in Iraq during the last decade of Ba'thist rule (see conclusion below).

[17] Klein, Naomi, *op.cit*.

[18] *Ibid.*

to "promote the welfare of the Iraqi people through the effective administration of the territory", and to create conditions that would allow Iraqis to "freely determine their future."[19] Bremer used this new mandate to justify implementation of a wider-ranging agenda of radically neo-liberal economic reforms, an agenda that included sweeping tax reform, removal of all restrictions on foreign investment. In a Wall Street Journal article of 20 June 2003, he announced a "wholesale reallocation of resources and people from state control to private enterprise"[20].

The makeover list was comprehensive: "revamp the banking system, modernize the stock exchange, privatize industries, and open the country to foreign investment. But [US officials are] well aware that many Iraqis are fearful of such changes. Auctioning off state-owned industries now would amount to selling at a market bottom, as Iraqi assets are unlikely to ever be worth less than they are today. At the same time, Iraqis are unlikely to ever be as poor as they are now, so unless restrictions are put in place, state owned companies will likely end up in foreign hands"[21]. In spite of these concerns, "the CPA initiated a package of free-market reforms reminiscent of the 'shock therapy' programs carried out in the early to mid-1990s in many of the transition economies of Central and Eastern Europe. Overnight Iraq became the most open economy in the Arab world"[22]. By early 2004, former Reagan Administration Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger could approvingly note: "We've already made great progress in introducing free-market concepts, including privatization, in Iraq. Tariffs are out; a limit of 15 percent has been imposed on all taxes; bans on foreign investment, for the most part, have been removed; and the CPA has announced plans to sell 150 of some 200 state-owned companies"[23]. Weinberger could only lament that US officials were stepping back from earlier plans to privatize Iraq's oil industry (an idea that was, ironically, opposed by the oil companies themselves, and that also spurred large cross-sectarian strike actions in the south of the country). In February 2004, the US Senate heard testimony confirming that Iraq's interim government was sticking to the menu handed over from the CPA[24].

As Robert Looney notes, this menu set out a neo-liberal wish list "centered around five key provisions:"[25] 1) the allowance of full foreign ownership and the repatriation of profits; 2) permission for foreign banks to set up shop and/or to purchase equity shares in existing Iraqi financial institutions; 3) a 15 percent cap on personal and corporate income tax (a measure that was realized with CPA Order 37); 4) reduction of tariffs to a universal rate of 5 percent; and 5) the privatization of state-owned enterprises (excepting, eventually, oil). Much has been made of the CPA's imposition of a 15 percent flat tax in Iraq, given that this is a measure that has proven politically impossible to push through even in the USA. However, the points made regarding taxes and tariffs are probably moot, as Iraq's interim government lacks the capacity (and the tax-base) to effectively enforce taxation in any case. Similarly, the dire security situation in Iraq has discouraged de facto foreign investment. Nevertheless, the implementation of CPA Order 39 of September 19, 2003—which allows foreign investment

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[19] http://www.daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/368/53/PDF/N0336853.pdf Open Element.

[20] Bremer, Paul: "Operation Iraqi Prosperity" *Wall Street Journal,* 20 june 2006.

[21] Kahn, Jeremy: "Making Iraq Safe for Capitalism", *Fortune* vol. 148, no. 1., (7 July 2003).

[22] Looney, Robert: "Post-War Iraq's Financial System...", *op. cit.*, p. 134.

[23] Weinberger, Casper W.: "Do We Want a Free Market in Iraq?", *Forbes,* vol. 173, no.3, (16 February 2004). Weinberger's commentary is also revealing in that he takes it as a foregone conclusion that international opposition to privatization of Iraq's oil sector is motivated by the fact that US firms were best positioned (both politically and in the market, one must presume) to beat out French and Russian competitors.

[24] Taylor, John B: "Financial Reconstruction in Iraq" *Testimony given to Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee: Subcommittee on International Trade and Finance* (11 February 2004).

[25] Looney, Robert: "Post-War Iraq's Financial System...", *op. cit.*, p. 135-36. I have slightly abridged/rephrased the points on Looney's list.

in Iraq's state-owned enterprises, 100 percent foreign ownership of Iraqi business entities, and allows investors to expatriate 100 percent of profits made in Iraq—is crucial because of its links to the broader US project of using market access to build coalitions, and because of the response it generates from below. According to Crocker, "Outside observers worried that the 'instant discarding' of Iraq's commercial culture could create serious distortions in Iraq's economy and that, in any event, the CPA lacked the legal authority to impose such radical reforms"[26]

Similarly, CPA Order 40, which defines the framework for setting up and regulating a system of private banking in Iraq, is also contentious in ways that are not apparent at first sight. By setting up the infrastructure of a formal financial framework, Order 40 has the potential to unsettle structures of transaction, interest, and livelihood that are embedded in the cash-based order that obtained through the 1990s. As Kahn reports, US economic consultants arrived to find a system in which "the exchange rate has been set by street-corner money-changers, some of whom the US suspects are linked to organized crime groups. What is clear is that the market lacks depth and can be manipulated by small groups of traders"[27]. Furthermore, with "no data available to crunch," experts found themselves reduced to "figuring out how best to stack money inside a truck"[28]. It is a situation that reveals the market as a constructed phenomenon shaped by struggles over interest, meaning, and power.

This brings us directly to questions about the intrinsic nature of "the market," its pretense to advance a logic that is universal (and hence politically neutral), and its relationship to the political world. To paraphrase Callon & Muniesa[29], markets are best understood as "calculative spaces:" arenas in which the relative value of a given entity or phenomenon is detached from the context of its production and evaluated in juxtaposition to other similarly detached entities or options.[30] Seen "from below," markets are thus situations that present agents with "distinctions between things or states of the world"[31]. These distinctions are not inherent in the nature of the "things" or "states" themselves, but are at least in part produced by the technological or institutional framework within which material goods and/or options are juxtaposed. The drawing and enforcing of boundaries, the insinuation of military force, and the establishment of a financial system—to name but three—are examples of such technologies of framing. As such, "the market" is a framework—the emergence or imposition of a "common operating principle"—that conditions the ability of actors to imagine and estimate the "courses of action associated with those things or with those states as well as their consequences"[32].

Yet because the market is typically presented as a neutral, self-contained, and self-regulating social arena—as something akin to a state of nature—the manipulative aspects of market articulation are obscured, blocking views of the political struggles, negotiations, and

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[26] Crocker, "Reconstructing Iraq's Economy", *op. cit*., p. 77.

[27] Kahn, *op. cit.*

[28] *Ibid*

[29] Callon, Michel and Muniesa, Fabian: "Economic Markets as Calculative Collective Devices", *Organizational Studies* 26(8), (2005), pp. 1229-1250.

[30] Callon, Michel (1998): "Introduction: The Embeddedness of Economic Markets in Economics" in *The Laws of Markets*, Oxford, M. Callon. Perhaps even more fundamentally, markets make encounters between supply and demand possible, and via diverse social, technological, legal and institutional mechanisms shape both the character and content of that encounter.

[31] Callon and Muniesa, *op. cit.,* p. 1231.

[32] *Ibid*

"political economy of meaning"[33] within which the validity of given operating principles might be asserted, challenged, and eventually transformed.[34] Markets produce winners and losers not only on the basis of the intrinsic values of competing goods and ideas, but also upon the basis of the operating principles that shape outcomes. In other words, the rhetoric of the market tends to obscure "asymmetries of calculation"[35] that are built in to given technical and institutional infrastructures regulating exchange and the aggregation of preferences. In Iraq, war was seen as a vehicle for insinuating a new framework of "calculative power"[36] into a given field of social and political intercourse, and this in such a way as to make it safe to advance the project of reconstituting the country's political and economic life in line with universal logics of market and global transition.[37] Inasmuch as these asymmetries might also correspond to patterns of geographical and/or ethnic distinction (themselves not inherent distinctions, but distinctions generated by given technologies, physical infrastructures, and paradigms of "expert" knowledge),[38] distinctions that as I show below were written into the constitution of post-occupation Iraq, the result might be the production of "durable categorical inequality," which Tilly[39] sees as corrosive of democratic development.

In any case, by attempting to create a particular infrastructure of capitalist conformity, the American project in Iraq sought to reduce transaction costs for US (and other politically favored and well positioned) investors, firms and corporate agents. Furthermore, by using incentives (e.g., access to the potentially lucrative Iraqi market) to mobilize powerful corporate and commercial agents whose interests coincide with dominant perceptions of US interest within the new order, policymakers no doubt sought to erect an infrastructure of indirect rule without the undue burden of direct US military, financial, and diplomatic input. In the thinking of Bush Administration strategist Paul Wolfowitz and his fellow travelers, Iraq's oil wealth would make this a cost-free exercise, freeing US the economic and military might to advance wider strategic goals in the region. As such, the project echoes both the 19th century British pattern of mobilizing private corporations as agents of colonial governance, and 20th century US interventions in Latin America, where (mostly indirect) military intervention linked up with the economic prescriptions of the "Chicago Boys" to underpin conjoined interests of corporate America and US strategic planning. (Unfortunately for Bush Administration strategists, the major US oil companies were less than enthusiastic about plans to privatize the oil sector, a major pillar of the Pentagon's original plan for transformation.)

But for the ideologues of the neo-con movement, neo-liberal principles were more than just a tool for articulating structures of political control and advancing immediate US interests, they provided a model for the organization and regulation of political life, and an

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[33] Parker, Christopher (1999): *Resignation or Revolt? Sociopolitical Development and the Challenges of Peace in Palestine.* London, IB Tauris.

[34] Callon and Muniesa, *op. cit*., p. 1233. "By saying that someone becomes the owner of something, we are referring to a market transaction, while by saying that something is a good belonging to someone, we emphasize the fact that it has been incorporated into the world of someone".

[35] *Ibid*

[36] *Ibid*

[37] Callon and Muniesa write that "Islolating objects from their original context, grouping them in the same frame, establishing original relations between them and summing them up are all costly activities that raise the question of calculative power." My argument here is essentially that war constitutes the "costly activity" aimed at establishing "calculative power" in the Iraqi case.

[38] For salient critiques of the role of expert knowledge in advancing political power, see—inter alia— Rose, Nikolas: "Government, authority, and expertise in advanced liberalism", *Economy and Society* vol. 22, no. 3, (August 1993), pp. 283-299; Bordieu, Pierre (1998): *Acts of Resistance (Against the New Myths of Our Time)*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

[39] Tilly, Charles: "Inequality, Democratization, and de-Democratization", *Sociological Theory* 21:1, (January 2003).

arena for the forging of a political subjectivity that reflected individual self-interest and self reliance. The deliberative field of citizens joining to make demands of the statist order would be replaced by a model in which the political world would manifest itself in the aggregate choices of individual consumers of public goods, leaving little room or efficacy for collective ideological projects advancing alternative views of the world (e.g., resistance to US or Israeli interests in the region). Indeed, CPA officials introduced "temporary" legislation (and in other cases maintained mandates of the previous order) that actively undermined efforts at collective deliberative action. A salient example is the maintenance of Saddam-era legislation that made trade unions illegal. Meanwhile, CPA officials sought to manage the residual sentiments of a political world beyond the market by channeling underlying potential for collective political action into a communal framework represented by intermediaries chosen from above. These efforts were presented as a politically neutral project of economic rationalization on the one hand, and as reflective of Iraq's domestic realities on the other.

Faith in the moral pedagogy of the market has always been a fundamental—if not always explicitly stated—pillar of neo-conservative thought. Like neo-liberals more generally, neo-conservatives view the market both as an instrument for dismantling the interventionist state, and as a model for reconstituting the political world. At least two things distinguish neo-conservatives from mainstream neo-liberals: the first is their revolutionary—almost messianic—faith in the role of American power in advancing the market as an agent of historical destiny; the second is the degree to which they push the link between the market and a particular set of conservative moral "virtues." Furthermore, whereas mainstream neo-liberal thinkers see demands for efficiency emanating from globalizing market forces that subject states to unavoidable pressures for reform, neo-conservatives see the market (or markets) as a political tool in its own right.[40] Responding to the chaos in the streets of Iraq's major cities soon after US forces had effectively occupied the whole country, US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld noted that "Freedom is untidy…people have to make [and presumably learn from] mistakes." "Democracy is messy," his Pentagon colleague Paul Wolfowitz added at around the same time.[41] If one looks at the effects of projects introduced to advance the market as an agent of change in the region—from the war in Iraq to QIZs in Jordan—one can see what they mean. Actually existing neo-liberalism in the Arab world has given rise to—inter alia—the specter of sectarian civil war in Iraq, and the importation of practices akin to indentured servitude in Jordan. To date, companies contracted by the US government to provide services related to administrative services, combat support, and reconstruction have been involved more in spreading values of corporate opportunism, exploitation, and graft than in diffusing the agents of liberal change. But at least the comments of Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz help us make tragic sense of George W. Bush's much repeated mantra: "Freedom is winning."

Much of the work done by the CPA in the first eighteen months of occupation was oriented toward advancing the market as framework for regulating political life while managing residual political passions with reference to the communal blueprint through which

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[40] Indeed, the rise of the "new left" in the 1970s—with its suspicion of the state, its privileging of identity as opposed to class politics, and its concern with "empowerment"—help to create a political field within which neo-liberalism generally, and neo-conservatism in particular, could thrive. It is no accident that many of today's outspoken neo-cons (revolutionary neo-liberals) were active in new-left politics in the late-1960s and early 1970s. In short, by abandoning faith in an emancipatory project grounded in notions of citizenship, the new left provided the neo-conservative new right with the donkey it rode in on.

[41] Rumsfeld reportedly suggested that this same messiness could be used to encourage fainthearted Europeans to step in with financial contributions, sparing US taxpayers the burden of paying Iraqi civil servants their salaries during the transition period.

it approached both the projects of building an exile opposition to Saddam, and that of governing occupied Iraq. And while these projects were challenged from outside (including, interestingly enough, by US oil interests), and inside (not only by insurgents, but also, for example, by organized oil workers), this contestation was not incorporated into the electoral process itself, which instead became a vehicle for advancing and consolidating communal interests in a political field that had been—whether by design or by deed—structured to encourage just such a communitarian calculus. In any case, governing through Iraq's presumed ethno-communitarian structure appeared as natural to a group of revolutionary neo-liberals in Washington who viewed the ideological struggles of the twentieth century as settled.[42] It is therefore unsurprising that the constitutional and electoral frameworks rushed into existence by US officials tended to consolidate rather than transcend these frameworks. Indeed, "the constitution making process became a new stake in the political battle rather than an instrument to resolve it"[43]. An awareness of these issues—both the ways in which elections are parachuted into environments arranged by pre-existing technologies of power, and the ways in which electoral/constitutional frameworks themselves shape calculative agency—is therefore crucial.

2. A (Larry) Diamond in the rough: universalizing values; inventing traditions

Speaking to a *Washington Post* reporter in the summer of 2003, a CPA official noted that "On balance, we believe its better to have a representative group of experts instead of a bunch of people with no credentials other than the fact that they won an election"[44]. In short, successful "transition to democracy" in Iraq was presented to the world largely as an issue of appropriate institutional design and advancing enlightened leadership. And even if this effort began haltingly, it was reflected on the ground: an array of economists, constitutional scholars, political advisors, project managers, and specialized firms arrived on the boot-heals of US troops to begin establishing the political infrastructure of a new Iraq. These specialists were more than simple agents of transition. They were engineers in an effort at reconstituting calculative agency in Iraq in ways that facilitated implementation of a wider political project. The Middle East would inevitably face up to a world redrawn in lines sketched by the supertanker, the jumbo-jet, and the Internet and they were there to help. War, from this perspective, was simply modernization theory by other means. Once the situation had stabilized, elections—being grounded in a universal principle and hence represented as external to the politics of both Iraqis and occupying forces—would provide a neutral mechanism through which to aggregate, order, and manage potentially conflicting preferences and interests in the domestic political field. No doubt, these experts saw it as their task to design, and oversee the implementation of, an electoral system that would encourage the articulation of just such a liberal political field in Iraq.[45] And to the extent that this project has

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[42] The great ideological struggle of the twentieth century of course being that between those who saw the state as the primary instrument for securing a moral political economic order, and those that saw the market as the foundation of a moral political economic order. Today, these revolutionary neo-liberals are seeking to advance their project by projecting it against the spectre of extremist Islam.

[43] International Crisis Group: "The Next Iraqi War? Sectarianism and Civil Conflict" *Middle East Report no. 52*, Amman/Brussels, (27 February 2006).

[44] Chandrasekaran, Rajiv, "Shiite Demand to Elect Constitution's Drafters Could Delay Transfer of Power" *Washington Post*, 21 October 2003.

[45] Ultimately, it would be interesting to follow the diffusion of these ideas between academic and policymaking circles, creating a self-confirming framework as these projects were implemented in real political world.

failed, these same "transitologists" have widely blamed the tactical blunders, military excesses, and political demands of US occupation authorities.[46]

When reading the memoirs and interviews of leading scholars involved in the project (e.g., Larry Diamond and Carlos Valenzuela), one is struck by the degree to which insightful and nuanced observations from the field are quickly trumped by large, a priori categories of political life that were presumably more conducive as building blocks of an order manageable within the framework of transitions theory.[47] Does this provide clues as to the limitations of, and the embedded assumptions of, liberal transitions theory? Several questions come to mind: How did the transitions narrative acquire its universal charisma? What is its relationship of its theorists with the forces that have advanced projects in the name of realizing these ideas? And what are the actual effects and consequences do projects that seek to make these ideas true? One way of exploring these questions would be through an ethnographic account of the charisma of the transition project, and of the material efforts of these "wizards of transition." While a full ethnographic account is beyond the scope of the current paper, the basic point can be made by briefly exploring the impact of the constitutional framework in articulating and providing a vehicle for sectarian political agendas and projects in post-Saddam Iraq. As applied in Iraq, efforts and outcomes at applying the methodology of transition expose the artificiality of frames advanced to organize and articulate a "process" of transition, and highlights salient contradictions of the enterprise. In order to work, the transitologists had to start from some basic assumptions about the constituent building blocks of the society into which they were to intervene: assumptions that could not be derived purely from the abstract claims of theory, but that depended on subjective representations of the world. And—at least in Iraq—these assumptions have gone a long way towards making themselves true. "Transition to democracy" is thus revealed as less a field of academic inquiry or an objective process than a political project that mobilizes power in order to rearrange agents and institutions in ways that make its underlying premises seem inevitable and universal. As such, it should be explored as a normative project that generates political effects in its own right.

Ultimately, even Bremer realized that he needed local cover to push through the radical neoliberal reform agenda sketched above; cover that extended beyond what could be provided by the existing seven-member Iraqi Leadership Council, a body that had been established by Jay Garner, his predecessor as chief US administrator in Iraq. He thus entered into negotiations with the favored exiles to expand this group to form a twenty-five member Iraqi Governing Council (ICG), which would "consult and coordinate on all matters involving the *temporary* governance of Iraq"[48]. The composition of the ICG was carefully constructed to reflect the sectarian/ethnic logic that had served as the organizing principle with which US policymakers had approached Iraq since before the invasion. Indeed, Bremer was continuing a process that had begun well in advance of the invasion itself. The US State Department had initiated contacts with exile Iraqi opposition groups already during the Clinton

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[46] See especially the writing of Diamond (2006), *op . cit*., on these points.

[47] The past two decades has of course seen the production of a voluminous literature dealing with "transitions" from authoritarian to democratic forms of government. While diverse perspectives are represented in this literature, a core of the "transitology" movement is centered around the *Journal of Democracy*, the editorial board of which groups a clique of influential academics who positioned themselves close to policy making circles during the 1990s. At least two prominent members of this board were brought into Iraq as advisors on democracy and institutional/constitutional design: Larry Diamond for the CPA and Carlos Valenzuela for the UN. While the transitions movement has a wide roof, mainstream "transitologists" share a faith in the power of appropriate institutional design to overcome the dilemmas of collective action that emerge along "pathways of transition," as well as a faith in the fundamental compatibility of democracy with market liberalism and its agents. As such, the transition project might be situated as a kind of progressive neo-liberalism.

[48] Diamond (2006), *op . cit*., p. 42.

Administration, an effort that was stepped up considerably with the arrival of George W. Bush and his team. By and large, the exile opposition advanced worldviews that were considerably more sectarian than those of most Iraqis. Nevertheless, this vision—together with an innate belief in the more progressive tendencies in Kurdish and Shiite culture that was advanced by many Middle East and Iraq experts close to the Pentagon and State Department—confirmed an existing tendency in the relevant policy circles to advance sectarian agents as a Trojan horse of transition.

In November 2002, the "Democratic Principles Working Group," an office within the State Departments wider "Future of Iraq Project," produced a report titled "The Transition to Democracy in Iraq"[49]. This report called for election of a transitional authority from the Iraqi exile community and the parts of Northern Iraq under control of the two main Kurdish parties. This group would then identify a credible means for expanding this authority to include Arab Iraqis from inside the country, before it drafted a constitution. The report also called for local government elections to be held as quickly as possible following an eventual overthrow of the Saddamist regime[50]. However, in spite of this original plan, on 16 May 2003, US authorities announced that "the idea of an interim government with real sovereign authority had been indefinitely postponed. Instead, the Americans and their allies would remain in Iraq under the newly formed Coalition Provisional Authority, led by an administrator (Paul Bremer) who would exercise all executive, legislative, and judicial power, manage ministries, and supervise the drafting of a constitution"[51]. On 22 May, the UN Security Council issued resolution 1483, which seemed to legitimize the presence of the US and British as occupying powers. The Americans handpicked the members of Iraq's "Interim Governing Council," the majority of whom came from amongst the exile groups. This opened the body to criticism that it merely represented an arm of the US occupation authority. Meanwhile, issues fundamental to the shaping of outcomes in any future political order were kept beyond the bounds of democratic contestation as the US continued to create and govern through institutions that consolidated a communitarian political calculus. In July 2003 Bremer cancelled plans for holding municipal elections in various localities throughout Iraq[52]. There would be no rush to elections, nor would the task of making Iraq safe for capitalism and democracy be left up to the Iraqis themselves.

Political pressures later led the US to change the timetable; in order to diffuse political support for the growing insurgency, and to encourage UN involvement (if only to distribute culpability), Bremer announced a timetable for the completion of tasks necessary for orderly transition to a sovereign Iraqi body. The CPA would (and did) hand over formal sovereignty to the handpicked Iraqi Governing Council on June 30, 2004. "Before that date, an interim constitution [the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL)] would be drawn up; an interim government would be chosen through a complex, indirect system of caucuses; and a constitutional assembly would be directly elected. After June 30, a permanent constitution would be drafted and approved by the elected assembly and ratified by popular referendum; elections would be held for a permanent government by the end of 2005"[53].

Even as Bush Administration officials and CPA chief Bremer were increasingly stressing the importance of a strong central state (with central control over, inter alia, oil resources), the CPA de facto continued to manage public sentiment, and channel political demands, through

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[49] *Ibid*., p. 27.
[50] *Ibid*., p. 28
[51] *Ibid*., p. 37.
[52] *Ibid*., p. 45.
[53] *Ibid*., p. 27.

sectarian intermediaries. This was enshrined in the composition of the Iraqi Governing Council, the federalization provisions of the Transitional Administrative Law, the Shiite-Kurd-Sunni troika of the Presidential Council, and the Iraqi Interim Authority that was handed power in the formal transfer of sovereignty to Iraqis on 28 June 2004, and not least in the elections that were held on 30 January 2005 to choose the membership of the Transitional National Authority, members of which would also be selected to write Iraq's constitution. As Conetta[54] notes, once enshrined, the sectarian logic was carried on "like a bad gene living on in the Iraqi body politic."

The TAL was drawn up by Larry Diamond together with Salem Chalabi, Faisal Istribadi (two Iraqi-American lawyers) and others—like Roman Martinez—who reflected the concerns of conservatives in the White House. From Diamond's own account, there was little consultation with Iraqis, apart from the liberal politician Adnan Pachachi. Kurdish concerns were also taken into account, as—by virtue of their de facto autonomy in the north—they would be bringing some of the most entrenched red lines to the negotiating table. The authors had two basic aims: first to enshrine values of individual liberty and human rights; and second to provide the contours of a framework most likely to facilitate negotiation on and eventual implementation of the technical aspects of transition. Foremost here was federalism, which aroused great controversy amongst all concerned. Kurdish nationalist parties worried that they would be trading in autonomy gained in the post-1991 period. SCIRI—the most prominent Shiite party—came to the conclusion that what was good for the Kurds in the north would be good for them in the south: they wanted the right to create larger autonomous regions by joining provinces in the south. While the mostly Sunni Arab inhabitants of the center of the country (at least outside Baghdad) expressed deep concern about a trend they saw as precipitating a breakup of Iraq. For Diamond[55], "it was difficult to see how Iraq's deep regional, ethnic, and sectarian divisions could be managed in a democracy without constitutional guarantees of autonomy. Many in Iraq and the Arab world did not understand what federalism meant, and saw US endorsement of it as part of a plot to weaken the country, rather than as an indispensable instrument to hold it together." In the end, the document was signed by the twenty-five member Iraqi Governing Council that had been handpicked by US authorities. As the CPA prepared a campaign for selling the TAL on the basis of its universal and progressive principles, grassroots sectors of the Iraqi public were quick to come out against the document, highlighting the facts that it had been ratified by an unelected body, and expressing concerns that—given what was perceived as an unrealistic transition time table advanced alongside it—it just might end up becoming permanent[56].

In any case, when elections were held for the Transitional National Assembly (TNA) in January of 2005, the inhabitants of the primarily Sunni central regions of Iraq boycotted en mass. The result was a body dominated by Shiite and Kurdish factions held together around core parties—parties that had been advanced by the US in the early stages of the project—with a sectarian base and agenda. Sunni Arabs filled only 17 of the 275 seats[57]. When a government was finally formed after three months of negotiations, Sunnis were included "in rough proportion with their share of the population," but this excluded "the Sunnis who mattered most politically—the nationalist, tribalist, and religious groups who were supporting

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[54] Conetta: "Masque of Democracy: Iraqi Election System Still Disfavors Sunnis, Favors Kurds" *Project on Defence Policy Briefing Memo #35,* (10 December 2005).
[55] Diamond (2006), *op . cit.*, p. 136
[56] *Ibid.*, pp. 179-210.
[57] *Ibid.*, p. 338.

and waging the insurgency"[58]. Perhaps more importantly, however, was the fact that the TNA would be electing delegates from its ranks to membership in the Constitutional Committee scheduled to draw up a permanent constitution for Iraq over the summer of 2005. Ultimately, the TNA elected not a single Sunni representative to the committee. And while US authorities eventually brokered the participation of 15 Sunnis in the Committee, their position was undermined as Kurdish and Shiite groups left the formal negotiating arena and continued informally amongst themselves without the Sunni delegates. On 11 August, SCIRI leader Abdel Aziz al-Hakim emerged to "endorse a proposal for one huge Shiite mega-region spanning all nine southern provinces"[59]. The fact that presumed communal cleavages are sometimes reflected in geography is a factor that hardened the impact that the constituent electoral framework had on sectarian political visions. In particular given that geography is tied to oil, which is in turn tied to economic destiny, the possibilities enshrined for regional autonomy gave parties advocating a sectarian/regional agenda a strong incentive with which to bring others on board.

The Bush Administration's *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*, released on 30 November 2005, stressed the need for "inclusive institutions that offer power-sharing mechanisms and minority protections." Such institutions, the document noted, would "demonstrate to disaffected [Arab] Sunnis that they have influence and the ability to protect their interests in a democratic Iraq." On the one hand, this statement reflected US awareness of the need to redress previous policy failures; on the other, it reflected the extent to which the entire project of reconfiguring Iraq's political society had become enmeshed in communitarian logic. Indeed, the January elections incorporated increasingly salient regional and communal disparities into the process of drawing up Iraq's Constitution. And throughout the process of negotiating a permanent constitution, the US sought to introduce a viable Sunni consensus position into the process. This reveals a certain contradiction in US aims: even as they were speaking out against parties seeking to advance sectarian agendas, officials identified the lack of a consensus Sunni position in the constitutional negotiations as a problem. While presenting itself as laying the foundations for governing Iraq on the basis of universal principle and Iraqi tradition, the forum was ultimately about forging "an all encompassing compact between *the communities* as a starting point for stabilizing the country"[60]. And while policymakers sought to redress some of these disparities through a redesign of the December 2005 electoral framework, a sectarian logic had already been enshrined into the governmental framework.[61] The fact that so much about the future shape of Iraq will be decided during the four year tenure of this first constitutionally sovereign government of the post-Saddam era makes this situation particularly troubling.

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[58] *Ibid*. It is noteworthy that Diamond's complaint is not with regard to the sectarian logic, but to the tactical failure to include the "right" Sunnis.

[59] *Ibid*., p. 345.

[60] International Crisis Group: "The Next Iraqi War? Sectarianism and Civil Conflict", *op. cit*., p.1

[61] Conetta: "Masque of Democracy: Iraqi Election System Still Disfavors Sunnis, Favors Kurds", *op. cit*. The procedure for advanced for the December elections addressed some of the more salient shortcomings of that which had obtained in January. Rather than treating the entire country as a single electoral district, the December election allocated 230 of the 275 CoR seats to candidates competing within provincial electoral districts. However, the number of candidates hailing from each district "corresponds to voter registration rolls from late 2004, when the [Arab] Sunni boycott was in full swing". Furthermore, Sunni Arabs remained at a disadvantage with respect to the remaining 45 seats—given to parties in accordance with the proportion of the national vote— since "this favors parties that draw their strength from regions with above average voter turnout". While impressive efforts were made to increase voter turnout in majority Sunni Arab districts on elections day, the composition and performance of the resulting government will have only added to Sunni Arab disaffection.

The degree to which outsiders have insisted on seeing Iraqi political society in sectarian terms is striking; and self-fulfilling.[62] According to the ICG (2005:5), Iraqis themselves consistently rejected the sectarian vision even as they found themselves increasingly forced to express themselves politically in precisely such a framework. Even as sectarian agendas have dominated the formal discussions about engineering transition (and a US exit strategy), evidence suggests that these ideas are less entrenched in public opinion than many would assume. Polling conducted by Mansoor Moaddel (2006)[63] suggests that Iraqis stand out in the region in terms of asserting their national (i.e., Iraqi) identity above alternatives (e.g., religious, sectarian, or ethnic). His survey suggests that 60 percent of all Baghdadis "consider themselves Iraqis above all."

It would be relatively easy to dismiss the initial celebratory response to Iraq's elections (see the introduction above) as grounded in politically motivated wishful thinking (re: as offering hope for a politically acceptable exit strategy). Subsequent developments in Iraq have in any case put such optimism back in its place: the specter of sectarian violence—if not outright civil war—has appeared on a scope and scale previously unknown in Iraq, and has been duly linked by critics both to shortcomings in the constitutional framework hurriedly midwife by US authorities during late-summer 2005, and to American insistence that elections be held "on schedule" for US domestic political reasons. These pressures left neither room nor time for the articulation of political platforms addressing issues of concern across sectarian lines. Yet there is a deeper sense in which this optimism reflected the central role elections have played in sustaining projects imbued with the charisma of global transition and newness; a charisma that universalizes ideas and values that are conveniently consistent with the interests of powerful actors, and that conceals the effects of these projects insofar as they are not consistent with outcomes predicted by theory. Elections produce winners not only on the basis of the intrinsic value of competing ideas and projects, but also upon the basis of the operating principles that shape and inform participation. In other words, the rhetoric of elections (and the charisma of liberal transition discourse more generally) tends to obscure asymmetries of power and calculation that are built into given technical and institutional infrastructures aggregating interests and preferences and regulating their interplay. Elections consolidated a calculative political framework that had been advanced by the Americans ahead of the invasion and later used to provide the political architecture of occupation. And against a broader project of revolutionary neo-liberalism that was being advanced by Coalition Provisional Authorities (CPA) under the leadership of Paul Bremer, political issues of fundamental importance and meaning to the shaping of the new order were placed beyond democratic contention, relegating contested politics to a residual arena of negotiating power arrangements between potentially conflicting communities.

Both prior to and following the invasion, US officials saw sectarianism as a framework for managing Iraqi political society in the absence of strong state institutions, and they actively advanced ethnic/sectarian communities as the constituent building blocks of the new

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[62] Packer, George (2005): *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq, op. cit.* The argument that Saddam governed by cultivating ethnic and tribal divisions is overstated; he did not so much cultivate communal divisions as undermine all secular, non-communal bases of opposition to his authority. Recalling his encounters in Iraq in the aftermath of the invasion, Packer writes: "As soon as I mentioned one of the unmentionable ethnic categories, I would be told (usually by a grey-haired gentleman in a suit jacket) that these were ideas imported by Westerners and Arab extremists, now one used to talk about Sunni, Shiite, or Kurd, all Iraqis suffered equally under Saddam, and the gentleman in the suit jacket himself had numerous cousins and neighbors in mixed marriages. There could never be a civil war in Iraq, because Iraqis don't think that way. I always found myself thinking: If only it were true."

[63] Moaddel, Mansoor (2006): *Values and Perception of the Islamic Publics: Findings of Values Surveys,* New York, Palgrave.

political order. Indeed—as recent ICG reports have perhaps most clearly illustrated—there is a fundamental sense in which the US project of articulating an indigenous political framework that was "safe for capitalism" on the one hand, and manageable within an electoral context on the other, was itself responsible for generating the increasingly violent sectarian rifts in Iraqi society today. For influential policymakers in Washington, the state was seen primarily as an instrument for mitigating and managing communal passions, while broader political goods, values, and interests were to be resituated within contexts that would reflect the mechanisms and logic of the market. Accordingly, elections were advanced to address ritual functions of legitimacy, and to reveal the actual balance of power between agents representing communal interests and visions of political life, thereby making it possible for communal agents to rationally negotiate the framework of a new order on that basis. Even as planners were forced to pull back from the more radical elements of neo-liberal restructuring, this communalist vision was built into the constitutional and electoral exercises that unfolded over the course of 2005. While no doubt reflecting genuine (however misguided) views within the administration regarding the nature of Iraqi politics and society, the communitarian framework was also convenient from the perspective of blocking articulation of any mass political movement that might undermine implementation of a revolutionary neo-liberal project. In other words, officials sought to segregate residual political interests and passions from the wider project of restructuring Iraq's political economy along neo-liberal lines. Against this backdrop, the electoral arena might be seen as consolidating and legitimating a calculative framework through which to manage the residual passions of a political world otherwise being remade in the image of the self-regulating market. In invoking the sectarian framework, occupation authorities were reviving a framework for managing political society reminiscent of that advanced by the Ottomans and British Mandate officials of earlier eras.

Commenting on the final constitution in the pages of the *Washington Post*, US Ambassador Khalilzad[64] asserted that the document contained an "enlightened synthesis of universal values and Iraqi traditions." At a deeper level, though, it seems that the effort to apply principles held to be universal both required and generated the invention of traditions through which Iraqis are now increasingly forced to invoke as they navigate their political world.

Conclusion: wizards of transition and spectres of political society

If war was seen as a vehicle for detaching and isolating actors, objects, and meanings from the statist calculative frameworks enforced under Saddam, then the market was advanced by the architects of Iraq's forced revolution as both arena of, and instrument for, the establishment of new relations of value and power. Indeed, by framing forced revolution in the reified language of global transition and newness, the project was naturalized, obscuring the narrower political interests, ideological assumptions, and a-liberal practices that were advanced within it. CPA policies—some of which were pulled from the more radical pages of the neo-liberal playbook—were presented as technical solutions to the problem of "leveraging" Iraq's domestic political economy into the contemporary world system. The depoliticized vision presented by the theory disguised the political arrangement and effect of calculative agencies introduced with the new order. The political subjectivity of citizens making claims upon a statist order would be refashioned into that of self-reliant consumers expressing preferences in a market of public goods; meanwhile, outstanding political

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[64] Khalilzad, Zalmay: "Politics breaks out in Iraq", *Washington Post,* 4 September 2005, p. B.07.

sentiments were projected upon—and actively channeled into—Iraq's ethnic and sectarian communities, as the CPA sought to manage the residual passions of a political world beyond the market through intermediaries of its own choosing.[65]

Similarly, efforts at engineering transition involved much more than simply opening channels for the "irrigation" of an Iraqi society passively rooted in the norms and affiliational sentiments of previous eras; they actively projected a particular managerial vision that Iraqis mobilized to variously accommodate, shape, and challenge. For institutional technicians like Diamond[66], the transition project was seen to have failed because of the bad seed planted by Pentagon planners and CPA officials in the immediate aftermath of the invasion. Furthermore, they saw their efforts and concerns consistently trumped by short-term political demands and the interference of Pentagon ideologues. But to focus exclusively on the ideological wishful-thinking and blunders that characterized the design and implementation of the project causes us to miss the limitations of the wider narrative of global transitions, both as it represents a set of ideas that organize our thinking about (and techniques for viewing) the political world, and as it launches projects that seek to realize and "make true" a particular vision of the political world. Elections were advanced as a technique for managing and maintaining equilibrium in the residual political field: i.e., the field of interests and preferences not amenable to reconfiguration and regulation along market lines (e.g., communalism). By shepherding a constitutional/electoral framework that created incentives for mobilization along sectarian and ethnic lines, de facto positing "communities" as the building blocks of a managerial political order articulated beyond the reach of either citizenship or the market, policymakers sought to protect the underlying project of economic restructuring from political demands. In seeking to manage transition through the framework of community, the project of transition consolidated a framework of calculative (i.e., politically exploitable) difference that was in fact much less salient to politics in the previous order than generally thought.

The view presented from the vantage point of liberal transition theory is also problematic to the extent that it tends to erect stereotypes of political life in those places where its logic seems not to apply. The picture of Iraq that emerged against the backdrop of the rise of the transitions paradigm over the 1980s and 1990s stressed the centralized, state dominated aspects of the economy and presented a picture of "the regime" as a black box that contained the institutional programming of a society bludgeoned into passivity by decades of authoritarian and militaristic rule, and that had retreated into social structures of tribe and sect that variously offered both shelter and resources for political manipulation. Theory could only explain the absence of transition in terms of the state's continued domination of the market and civil society, and as such failed to recognize the complex ways in which statist agency became enmeshed in largely self-regulating social complexes of capital formation and power during the 1980s and 1990s, complexes that—while sometimes embedded in a brutal logic of survival and control over clandestine markets—nevertheless revealed the creative agency of Iraqis as they navigated the hardship created by two decades of war and sanctions. Indeed, the

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[65] There is a growing tendency to pass off responsibility for the failure of the project to the Iraqis themselves. For example, in responding to the questions of a skeptical public during BBC One's *Question Time* program on the evening of 28 September 2006, Jack Straw—UK foreign minister at the time of the invastion—suggested that the USA and UK could hardly be blamed for the fact that "Muslims were killing Muslims in Iraq." The comment would seem to imply that ongoing violence in Iraq is the result of some cultural defect of Iraqi society; simply more evidence that the Muslim world was in need of modernization and democratization, forced or otherwise. Through a perverse logic, conditions largely created by the intervention are thus turned around to justify the intervention itself.

[66] Diamond, Larry: "What Went Wrong in Iraq", *Foreign Affairs* 83(5) (Sept-Oct 2004), pp. 34-56; Diamond, (2006), *op . cit.*

problem of reforming Iraq's state controlled economy was one of the most frequently cited challenges facing CPA authorities in the first months of occupation. The problem was that this presumed state control was largely a myth.[67]

While the role of state agencies in capital formation and (re)distribution in the economy certainly increased dramatically during the oil-boom of the 1970s, the nature and scope of this involvement was to change radically in the wake of subsequent fiscal crises. The long war with Iran, the fall in oil prices during the 1980s, the invasion of Kuwait, and the ensuing 12 years of international sanctions all encouraged a decentralization of economic power, a process that was accelerated by Saddam's program of *infitah* (privatization and market reform) at the end of the 1980s. Essentially, the national economy broke apart into diverse complexes of production and trade—both licit and illicit—that linked domestic Iraqi actors (many situated in centers of state power like the Republican Guard) with private actors in neighboring countries. Saddam and his inner circle did not so much try to dominate these complexes as use state powers to position themselves at the elevated center of diverse and largely self-regulating enclaves of capital formation. Because these enclaves were not exclusively dependent upon or determined by Saddamist regime, they did not collapse with the fall of that regime. Rather, the statist agencies involved in the articulation of these complexes were de facto privatized in the form of militias, who were able to draw on available stockpiles and use violence as a means of controlling trade routes and demarcating economic space. In sum a fully articulated militia economy has emerged which is tied to sources of accumulation beyond Iraq's border. Increasingly, in the absence of an effective central or local state, these networks are entrenching themselves in spaces delineated by sectarian symbols and institutions.

To date, the problematic outcomes and effects of forced revolution have been attributed more to tactical blunders and native passions than to contradictions that inhere within the projects of revolutionary neo-liberalism and transition themselves. This paper has sought to de-naturalize the underlying mythology of global transition upon which the project of forced revolution was overlaid: whereas mainstream approaches tend to take the logic of transition for granted and look inward in search of variables that undermine the process, this paper has viewed transition as a project and sought to analyze its *effects* in the real world. Ironically, it seems that occupation authorities have resorted to tactics much the same as those invoked by earlier generations of frustrated state builders in Iraq. Faced with the task of reorganizing society to conform to a vision of statist/market order from above without the instruments of a strong state or the vicissitudes of time, the architects of Iraq's force revolution are increasingly resorting to exercising influence through the supposedly given categories of Iraqi society. Much like the Ottoman reformers and "Chicago boys" of earlier eras, contemporary agents of neoliberal doctrine have had difficulty realizing the significance of underlying (or overriding) power structures to their conceits of apolitical, managerial good governance and the largely self-regulating market. Insurgency represents a particularly dramatic case illustrating that the implementation of neo-liberal reform ultimately depends on processes of enforcement.

The USA is "an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality," one of George W. Bush's advisors said to journalist Ron Suskind. "And while you're studying that reality—

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[67] While invoking war as a change agent in Iraq was a controversial policy decision, few really doubted that "the regime" as such was an appropriate target and focus of transition. After all, understandings of Iraqi political life over the previous fifteen to twenty years had largely taken shape against assumptions advanced by transitions theory. While chaos might be sewn by forces imbued with the logic of, and nostalgia for, the previous order, few questioned the logic and assumptions of the transition model itself.

judiciously as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors, and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do"[68]. Today in Baghdad, the project of transition has been reduced to the building of earth walls, the digging of ditches… in a desperate attempt to manage the consequences of forced revolution. A spatial grid is literally being carved into, and bulldozed upon, the earth in a desperate attempt to manage a political world that has been reduced to a Hobbesian war of all against all; and in the process, they are consolidating pockets of potentially conflicting difference in political society. It would be difficult to imagine an outcome further removed from the channels of irrigation envisioned by Diamond (cited in the introduction above). One thing seems certain: in mobilizing US power to make their ideas come true, the revolutionary neo-liberals in the Bush Administration have—willy nilly—changed the world. But they have done so in ways they almost certainly did not intend: Like Goethe's wizard's apprentice, US policymakers now find themselves unable to contain ghosts they themselves called into existence, with nightmarish consequences for the people of Iraq.

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