

Federal Iraq and Unitary Afghanistan: A comparative analysis of plural societies¹

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the ongoing democratization process in Iraq and Afghanistan. It examines the political institutions established in both countries by using the comparative method of analysis. The paper shows that both Iraq and Afghanistan are primarily plural societies and are divided along sectarian and ethnic lines. Drawing from the academic literature, the paper proposes that consociational democracy is the best democratic alternative for plural/divided societies. The paper mainly argues that even though Iraq and Afghanistan share somewhat similar demographic characteristics, their newly installed democratic institutions reveal a sharp contrast. It investigates the reasons for this dissimilar choice of political institutions and proposes that the democratic institutions in both the countries must be formulated in line with the principles of consociational democracy.

Keywords: Democratization, Iraq, Afghanistan, Plural Societies, Consociational Democracy, Comparative method

Introduction

Iraq and Afghanistan have dominated the global political stage for over a decade now, yet the crisis is far from over. Both Afghanistan and Iraq witnessed US military intervention in 2001 and 2003 respectively. The US intervention was primarily aimed at ousting the controversial regimes of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath party in Iraq and Mullah Omar's Taliban in Afghanistan (the later was allegedly supporting the Al-Qaeda terrorist network). Ever since the US intervention, the two countries have gone through considerable political transformation. The two countries, which had previously been under dictatorial and totalitarian systems, were suddenly exposed to liberal democratic alternatives. As expected, the transition of both countries from a highly centralized and authoritarian system towards a democratic one has been full of glitches and hiccups.

Prior to the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, it was largely argued by the American policy makers that a democratic Afghanistan and Iraq would not only improve the political and economic wellbeing of citizens in both countries but it will also set the stage for peaceful settlement of all regional disputes. Furthermore, such an endeavor would also promote democracy in the Middle East and beyond (Enterline & Greig,

¹ This article has been adopted from a research paper that was written when I was doing my Masters in Politics at the University of Warwick. It has, however, not been published before.

2008). They did not, however, or perhaps chose not to foresee the problems associated with installing democratic regimes in such divided and fragmented societies. As a result, after almost a decade of engagement in the two countries, they have achieved little, if at all any success. Although there are numerous factors that are responsible for unstable democracy (in aspiring democracies) this paper will, however, primarily focus on democratic intuitional deficiencies.

This paper broadly looks at the institutional choices that have been adopted in the two countries to implement democracy. Durable democracy demands strong institutions that may vary from country to country depending upon the social and communal structure of every country. Iraq and Afghanistan share a somewhat similar social structure as both the countries are divided sharply across communal lines. The choice of political institutions should therefore be as such to accommodate this verity. The paper will thus examine the political institutions that have been installed in the two countries to meet the challenges of segmental cleavages. It will also assess different democratic models that have been recommended in academic literature for ethnically divided societies. First it will briefly discuss the different understandings and interpretations of democracy.

The Density of Democracy

‘Although democracy has now become the most common regime type across the world, there is a growing concern that its foundations are now less robust than before.’ (Caramani, 2011: 98)

Even though democracy is a concept that virtually defies definition (Lijphart, 1977: 4), it originally was a simple phenomenon, which has now become immensely complex, especially in the last few decades. The second and third waves of democracy in particular are primarily responsible for this complication. Democracy is no longer simply democracy; there is now constitutional democracy, electoral democracy, illiberal democracy, deliberative democracy and so on (Caramani, 2011: 87).

At the outset, however, democracy can be analyzed at two distinct levels; procedural and substantive. At the procedural level, the focus is on the organization of the regime and the process by which responsibility, accountability and legitimacy are assured. On the other hand, the substantive level also entails to promote principles of equality, fairness and inclusion (Caramani, 2011: 88). The procedural level, thus provides a strict and rather narrow definition of democracy, whereas the substantive level incorporates a much broader sense. The procedural and substantive levels can respectively be applied to the two most popular notions of democracy, namely, liberal and illiberal.

A liberal democracy encompasses all the fundamental principles of democracy such as freedom of speech, expression, religion etc. The term ‘polyarchy’, initially introduced

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by Dahl (Dahl, 1971: 1-9) has excessively been used in academic literature to refer to liberal democracy (see Doorenspleet, 2005; Lijphart, 1977). Illiberal democracy, on the other hand, is a rather recent categorization, which was more or less unknown prior to the late 1980s. It is primarily categorized by the establishment of a formal electoral process but suffers from major shortcomings in terms of constitutional liberties and usually puts limits on individual freedoms and rights (Caramani, 2011: 88). Illiberal democracy is also popularly referred to as electoral democracy (see Zakaria, 1997; Diamond, 1999). It has been criticized for being democratic only in terms of elections and neglecting democratic fundamentals such as constitutional liberties.

Most of the democracies that emerged after the third wave are usually categorized as illiberal democracies. The term liberal democracy is often associated with western liberal values, which make it near to impossible for various aspiring democracies, particularly in Asia to be categorized as liberal democracies. For instance, it has largely been pointed out that the democratic systems installed in Iraq and Afghanistan are largely illiberal (despite contrary efforts by the US). Though this claim holds some water, but it tends to ignore some key underlying social and cultural realities, evident in both countries. The real problem, however, is with the interpretation of the term liberal democracy. The understanding of liberal democracy has long been conditioned by western liberal values, which are at sharp contrast with many Asian countries, particularly the Muslim countries. In case of Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance, the constitution and the political institutions have to be crafted in the light of Islamic values fundamental to all communal groups. As Khalilzad points out, 'Both constitutions strike a delicate but necessarily ambiguous balance between Islam and secularism' (2010: 41). Perhaps what is required, therefore, is a much broader sense of the term liberal democracy, which can accommodate fundamental values of not only western countries but also all other countries.

I will now see how it all plays out in Iraq and Afghanistan, both of which have made a recent transition to democracy.

A case of 'Imposed Democracy'

Arguably in the academic literature, democracy is the best form of government. Many countries of the world have undergone a transition to democracy since WWII. However, the crude fact remains that in most of these instances, this democratic transition was somewhat imposed. Imposed democratic regimes are democratic governments that are installed by a victorious foreign power after defeating a country. This trend started after the end of WWII when the Allies deemed democracy imperative for avoiding any future world war. Prominent examples of post-World War II imposed democracies are Germany and Japan, where foreign powers removed the governments and established entirely new democratic political institutions. Iraq and

Afghanistan are of course similar cases in this respect (Enterline & Greig, 2008: 323-24).

The success of imposed democracies in Germany and Japan has been reiterated countless times in academic literature. Both the countries not only made successful transition to democracy but also transformed into leading world economies that presented a near perfect democratic model for all aspiring democracies. Yet the achievement of both these countries should not delude policy makers about prospects of democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq. Indeed if the US foreign policy towards Iraq and Afghanistan is solely based on the success story of Germany and Japan, then it is doomed to fail. Afghanistan and Iraq are fundamentally different from Germany and Japan. Enterline and Greig restate this point in their examination of the overall historical performance of imposed democracies (2008). The result of their research does not hold promise for the durability of democracy in both Afghanistan and Iraq. The basis for their inference is rooted in socio-economic factors, which will be discussed under the next heading.

Afghanistan and Iraq: A socio-economic comparison

It is imperative to make a brief socio-economic comparison of Iraq and Afghanistan because it has a strong bearing on democratic transition. Both Afghanistan and Iraq are sharply divided across ethnic and religious lines. Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic society with Pashtun being the largest ethnic group followed by Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara groups. The Afghan population is almost entirely Muslim with over 80% belonging to the Sunni sect of Islam (Olesen, 1995). Iraq, on the other hand, has an overwhelming majority of Arab population who account for more than 75% of the entire population. The other major ethnic group is the Kurdish population (Polk, 2006). Iraq like Afghanistan, is also an overwhelmingly Muslim majority country, however, there is stark sectarian line that divides the country between Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims. The Shia Muslims have a clear majority over it rival sectarian and all other ethnic groups in the country.

Afghanistan thus has a low level of religious fractionalization but a considerable high degree of ethnic fractionalization. Whereas, Iraq is doubly cursed, falling amid both ethnic and religious fractionalization. On the economic front, however, Iraq has a clear advantage over Afghanistan. With a GDP per capita of only \$800 (in 2006), Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. Iraq, by contrast, has huge reservoirs of oil and has a much higher GDP per capita (Enterline & Greig, 2008: 341).

These demographic characteristics of Iraq and Afghanistan pose a fundamental challenge to the survival of democratic institutions instated in both countries. Throughout the academic literature on democracy, it has been starkly pointed out that

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the greater the division in a society, the greater the difficulty it will have for a successful transition to democracy (Zakaria, 1997; Diamond, 1999, Lijphart 1971). Similarly, economic prosperity also plays a very important role in the democratic transition of any country. The more prosperous a country, the more chances it will have of a successful democratic transition (Enterline & Greig, 2008). In this respect, Iraq has a clear advantage over Afghanistan. However, at the same time, the ethnic and sectarian cleavages are more severe in Iraq than Afghanistan and render a great impediment to the progress and development of democratic institutions. For these very reasons, Enterline & Greig, in their analysis of imposed democracies, are not very optimistic about the prospects of democratic transition in Iraq and Afghanistan, they point out that, ‘... the domestic, social and economic environments within which democracy is being cultivated suggests an even bleaker picture for durable democratic institutions in each state.’ (Enterline & Greig, 2008: 341).

Divided societies and Consociational democracy

The demographic characteristics of both Iraq and Afghanistan reveal a sharp division across ethnic and sectarian lines. These very characteristics categorize both the countries as divided/plural societies. Many academics have traditionally been apprehensive about the prospects of representative democracy in a plural/divided society. Instead, social homogeneity is often regarded as a pre-requisite for successful representative democracy. Furnivall, for instance insists that plural societies are not capable of sustaining a democratic government. M.G. Smith suggests that many of such plural societies eventually dissolve into separate independent states to maintain their culture and identity (see Lijphart 1977: 16-21). Likewise, Mill believes that ‘free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities’ (Mill, 1958: 230).

Despite this pessimism, vivid in academic literature are counter-argument in support of democratic plural societies. Arend Lijphart’s iconic work in this context is of considerable importance. Lijphart points out that a fundamental mistake that is committed by much of the theoretical literature on political development is to exaggerate the degree of homogeneity of the successful Western democratic countries. He supports his argument by pointing out the racial cleavages that exist in United States, the religious division pertinent in Ireland and so on (Lijphart, 1977: 21-24). Hence, if democracy can work in the western plural societies, then it can be equally successful in the other parts of the world. For Lijphart the key is how democracy is implemented in divided societies and this is where the concept of ‘consociational democracy’ comes into play.

Consociational democracy broadly refers to power sharing and group autonomy (Lijphart, 2004: 97). It is in stark contrast with the ‘majoritarian system’, which simply stands for the rule of the majority. Lijphart is fairly critical of majoritarian

system in plural societies. According to him such a system will result in the domination of one group, which could easily lead to the exploitation of minority groups, since in a majoritarian system the winning party exercises virtually limitless power (Caramani, 2011: 95). This in turn could hamper the overall democratic prospects of the country.

Since plural or divided societies constitute of different groups living together, therefore, an effective system of power sharing and group autonomy between them can ensure a viable political system. 'Power sharing denotes the participation of representatives of all significant communal groups in political decision making, especially at the executive level; group autonomy means that these groups have authority to run their own internal affairs, especially in the areas of education and culture' (Lijphart, 2004: 97).

Although these two factors are the key attributes, consociational democracy, however, also emphasizes two more additional elements, 'mutual veto' and 'proportionality' (Lijphart, 1977: 25). Mutual veto is an additional measure to fully ensure and secure the fundamental rights of all the communal groups, whereas proportionality provides for rightful proportional representation of communal groups in all government and civil services.

Iraq and Afghanistan are, by all definitions, plural societies. Thus, the most appropriate political system for both these countries, as far as theory goes, should be based on the consociational democratic model. A deep analysis of the political institutions installed in the two countries will reveal how close they are to consociational democracy. Furthermore, the analysis will also be able to gauge the overall performance and future prospects of democracy in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

1. Constitutional comparison

A constitution is a body of meta-norms or higher-order legal rules and principles that specify how all other legal rules and norms are to be made, applied, enforced and interpreted (Caramani, 2011: 164). On the face of it, two different types of constitutions can be identified; 'the legislative supremacy constitution' and the 'higher law constitution.' In the legislative supremacy constitution, the legislature is the supreme authority and can change the constitution through an act of the parliament. On the other hand, the higher law constitution puts substantive constraints on public authority and cannot be changed easily (Caramani, 2011: 165-67). From the perspective of consociational democracy, only the higher law constitution can work for plural societies. The higher law constitution can guarantee the basic elements of mutual veto, proportionality, and can thus effectively preserve balance of power and group autonomy among the communal groups.

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It is but only logical that both Afghanistan and Iraq eventually adopt ‘the higher level constitution.’ In reality, the constitution of Afghanistan embraced a centralized system with a unitary form of government. Thus, the constitution establishes a strong centralized government with a popularly elected president, parliament and an independent judiciary. In contrast, the Iraqi constitution embraces a parliamentary system with a federal form of government. Thus the constitution establishes a decentralized system and ensures group autonomy (Khalilzad, 2010: 44-47).

A comparison of both the constitutions reveals that the Iraqi constitution is in line with the principles of consociational democracy as it guarantees power sharing, group autonomy, mutual veto and proportionality. The Afghan constitution, on the other hand, does not appear to be in line with consociational democracy. A powerful presidency in the center and a strong centralized system, contradicts the fundamental principles of consociational democracy. The choice for these different systems will be discussed later on in the paper. However, despite these fundamental differences, there are some similarities as well. The articles of both the countries guarantee freedom of speech, faith and religion. Both the constitutions also provide for effective women representation in the parliament (Khalilzad, 2010: 45). These similarities of ensuring fundamental human rights, in the constitutions of both the countries, can be seen as an attempt to ensure the application of liberal democratic values from the outset.

2. Federation Vs Unitary Government

As already discussed, the constitutions of Iraq and Afghanistan opted for a federal and unitary form of government respectively. This major difference in constitutional choice is not really clear since both the countries have somewhat similar demographic characteristics, with communal groups divided along ethnic and sectarian lines (as pointed out earlier). A federal form of government ensures ‘segmental autonomy’ which is an important attribute of consociational democracy. Segmental autonomy entails minority rule; ‘rule by the minority over itself in the area of minority’s exclusive concern’ (Lijphart, 1977: 41).

Other major elements of consociational democracy, such as power sharing, mutual veto and proportionality can best be ensured by a federal form of government. As Lijphart points out, ‘For divided societies with geographically concentrated communal groups, a federal system is undoubtedly an excellent way to provide autonomy for these groups’ (Lijphart, 2004: 104). Thus, the choice of unitary form of government in Afghanistan is in strict contrast with the fundamentals of consociational democracy. In comparison, the federal system established in Iraq is in line with consociational democracy. The Iraqi constitution delegates substantial powers to all the communal groups. Furthermore, the federal system in Iraq establishes sub-autonomous units that enjoy a great deal of freedom in all internal matters of the province (Brancati, 2004).

The unitary design of government in Afghanistan could be seen as an attempt to foster national integration among the different Afghan factions. The only upside of such an approach is that it draws on the Afghan traditions, particularly from the period of 1950s-60s which many Afghans regard as the golden era of political stability and progress (Khalilzad, 2010: 44). However, it can also be argued that such an approach was taken to shunt the Taliban and other extremist factions (who are present in large numbers) out of power. I will come back to this point later when I will critically assess the choice of political institutions and their impact on future prospects of durable democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan.

3. Presidential and parliamentary dilemma

The presidential and parliamentary form of governments, embody two distinct forms of political systems. In the parliamentary form of government, the executive is selected from within, and by, the legislature. The executive is first and foremost responsible to the elected legislature. Whereas in the presidential system, the executive and legislature are elected independent of each other and the executive is primarily responsible to the public.

The terms ‘fused-power’ and ‘separation-of-power’ systems are also used for the parliamentary and presidential forms of governments respectively (Caramani, 2011: 122-140). Much of the theoretical literature on plural societies recommends a parliamentary form of government. Lijphart in particular, is quite apprehensive about the workability of presidential system in divided societies because of the inherent rigidity in presidentialism. Lijphart believes that countries, which have deep ethnic and other cleavages, should opt for political institutions that provide a window for power sharing. He points out that, ‘As the cabinet in a parliamentary system is a collegial decision-making body, as opposed to the presidential one-person executive with a purely advisory cabinet, it offers the optimal setting for forming a broad power-sharing executive’ (Lijphart, 2004: 101).

The Iraqi constitution in setting up a federal form of government has opted for a parliamentary form of government, whereas the Afghan constitution has set up a unitary form of government with a presidential system.

Thus, it can be easily pointed out that the Iraqi government structure by far, is consistent with the principles of consociational democracy, whereas the Afghan government structure is the exact opposite. While the reason for the adoption of the presidential form of government by Afghanistan can again be attributed to attempts of state building and national integration, the choice when compared with the Iraqi government appears somewhat perplexing. These respective choices of governments will be further discussed and evaluated in the later part of this paper.

4. The legislative system and proportional representation

One of most daunting challenge that constitutional writers face is to decide the respective type of legislative system. Among the different legislative systems, the two broad categories are, majoritarian system and proportional representation (PR). Most of the academic literature endorses proportional representation for plural and divided societies. A PR system stands in contrast with the majoritarian system as it ensures participation of all communal groups in the political process, ‘...the basic aim of proportional representation is to represent both majorities and minorities and to translate votes into seats in a proportional way’ (Doorenspleet, 2005: 365).

Lijphart believes that a divided society must ensure a broad representation of all communal groups and the optimum way to ensure this is by implementing the PR system. Lijphart also lays strong emphasis on the role of political parties in the election of the legislature. He points out that, ‘In representative democracy, parties provide the vital link between voters and the government, and in divided societies they are crucial in voicing the interests of communal groups’ (Lijphart, 2005: 102). Doorenspleet empirically tested the performance of PR systems and recommended them for divided societies. She also points out that PR systems promote high level of good governance and overall perform better than all other electoral systems in divided societies (Doorenspleet, 2005).

An examination of the Iraqi and Afghan legislative systems reveals a sharp contrast. The legislative system developed in Iraq is in accordance with the PR guidelines. In Iraqi politics, the political parties play a very crucial role in determining the outcome of legislative elections. The country has adopted an ‘open list electoral system’ which accommodates political parties and is in line with proportional representation. On the other hand, the Afghan legislative system, with its strong presidency and separation of power system, is close to the majoritarian system.

Political parties, which are considered vital for proportional representation, are absent in the current Afghan political system. Its electoral system is based on the ‘single non transferable voting system’ (SNTV). The proponents of consociational democracy have largely criticized this voting system since it hinders the development of effective political parties. Nixon and Ponzio suggest that ‘Afghanistan’s Single-Non Transferable Vote system should be reconsidered at both national and sub-national levels, in favor of systems that encourage the development of new parties...’ (Nixon and Ponzio, 2007: 37). Again this visible difference between the legislature and electoral process of the two countries is rather puzzling, since both countries have similar communal groups. This riddle along with other questions will be addressed in the following section.

Political Institutions and durable democracy: An assessment

I will now try to answer various questions that have been raised over the choice of various political institutions in the two countries. The most puzzling choice perhaps is the adoption of centralized and presidential form of government in Afghanistan. The current Afghanistan state structure is one of the most highly centralized systems in the world. Decisions regarding budgeting, reporting and appointments are all concentrated at the center. 'The provinces do not have any independent budgetary authority nor can they retain revenues' (Nixon and Ponzio, 2007: 32). On top of this, a strict line has been drawn over the place of political parties in the political process. Thus, 'While party affiliation can be a candidate's ticket to office in Iraq, Afghan candidates were prohibited from even stating their party affiliations' (Khalilzad, 2010: 45).

It has been argued that one of the main reasons why the Americans and the Afghan government are wary of allowing effective political parties is because most of the organized parties are of the same militant leaders 'whose competition had been central to the destruction wrought by internal conflict in the 1990s, and contributed to the rise to power of the Taliban' (Nixon and Ponzio, 2007: 30). The Americans have been very cautious to not allow any fundamentalist/Islamist group from participating in the political process. Their fears are understandable as they ousted the Islamist fundamentalists (Taliban) from power and allowing them to re-form political parties would put a question mark over the entire US military intervention. Furthermore, it is also argued that the current centralized Afghanistan government is the best way to unite the fragmented communal groups and such efforts would, in the long run, promote national integration (Nixon and Ponzio, 2007).

The argument of 'national integration' is quite popular and is propagated by the critics of consociational democracy. The supporters of this alternative view believe that development of democracy is highly dependent upon national integration and state building, which can be accomplished by eradicating primordial sub-national attachments (See e.g. Pye 1971, Smith 1969, Binder, 1964). The application of such a view to divided societies would involve replacement of communal loyalties by a common national allegiance.

Although such propositions appear to provide straightforward solutions to the problems of plural societies, they are, however, far from practical. Lijphart, in particular is quite apprehensive of all such 'state building' approaches. He not only considers such approaches naïve but also views them as very dangerous, since all such national integration attempts tend to undermine segmental loyalties which can back fire by stimulating 'segmental cohesion and inter-segmental violence rather than national cohesion' (Lijphart, 1977: 24). Afghanistan, so far, has been following this strategy of national integration and state building and so far the results of all such efforts have not been very promising.

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A contrast of the progress of democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan reveals that the former has clearly made more visible progress than the latter (Khalilzad, 2010: 48), which is peculiar because the democratization process started two years later in Iraq. The underlying conditions in the two countries does slightly account for this verity as Iraq has greater material resources and its population is much more educated than Afghanistan, with 75% living in the Urban areas (Byman and Pollock, 2003: 121). Furthermore, Iraq had much greater number of foreign soldiers fielding security than Afghanistan ever had and security is particularly important for smooth functioning of political institutions during democratic transitions, especially in the case of imposed democracies.

Despite these relative advantages, however, the fact remains that the social and ethnic cleavages that exit in Iraq are far graver and pose much greater challenges than Afghanistan. In spite of all this, Iraq has been able to make much more democratic progress than Afghanistan. This limited success, in part can be attributed to the implementation of consociational democracy. The installation of federalism and with rights of power sharing, mutual veto and group autonomy assured by the higher constitution, the various sub-national groups in Iraq have the assurance that no single communal group is going to dominate the others and that their fundamental rights will be fully protected. On the other hand, the centralized presidential form of government in Afghanistan continuously undermines segmental autonomy and has been one of the major sources of inter-segmental violence.

The United States thus has arguably made some progress with its efforts in Iraq. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for Afghanistan. United States and the current Afghanistan government will eventually have to rethink their current democratic strategy. This will eventually require a break from the current policy of highly centralized system towards a de-centralized system based on the fundamental attributes of consociational democracy (Federal, parliamentary and proportional representation systems). The 'Kabul-centric' approach has led to strong disparities within the Afghan community that adversely affects the development of democracy in Afghanistan (Nixon and Ponzio, 2007: 21).

The United States also needs to realize that the current presidential and centralized system is workable only in the short run because it is being enforced by superior foreign troops. In the long run, the success chances of such a centralized form of government without US military support seem very bleak. Even at the current moment, the segmental cleavages (because of many ethnic groups deprived of any political participation) are highly visible and have been undermining the entire democratic process. The current policy does not provide a long-term solution for durable democracy. Though recently some efforts have been made to include Taliban in the mainstream politics, but they have not yielded any significant outcome.

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Moreover, reconciling differences with the Taliban and other fundamentalists is not going to solve the problem. If Afghanistan wants to have a sustainable durable democracy, then it will eventually have to revise its political institutions and craft them along the lines of the Iraqi political system, which is based on the principles of consociational democracy.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to analyze the political institutions in Iraq and Afghanistan and how they impact the overall democratic process in the two countries. The main arguments of the paper can be summarized as follow:

- Iraq and Afghanistan are, by all definitions, plural/divided societies. This demographic characteristic of the two countries entails distinct communal groups that pose a serious challenge to the prospects of democracy in both countries.
- Out of the academic literature, Consociational democracy provides the most appropriate solutions for divided societies, as it guarantees power sharing, group autonomy, mutual veto and proportionality.
- By adopting a federal and parliamentary form of government, the Iraq government has acknowledged the fundamental principles of consociational democracy. Afghanistan on the other hand, has adopted a strong centralized system that contradicts the fundamentals of consociational democracy.
- The application of majoritarian system and national integration in plural societies such as Iraq and Afghanistan can back fire with devastating consequences.

Political institutions are, thus, vital in determining the success of democracy in any country. The choice of appropriate political systems, compatible with the demographic characteristics of a country can yield striking results. Consociational democracy is recommended for divided societies because it takes the segmental cleavages into consideration and guarantees protection and proportional representation to all concerned groups. The ethnic and sectarian cleavages in Iraq and Afghanistan, therefore, demand consociational democratic norms. While this demand has accordingly been met in Iraq, it has largely been neglected in Afghanistan. The persistence of United States with a system that is against the tide of socio-cultural requirements of Afghanistan is partly responsible for the current political turmoil in the country. A state is bound to fail if its political institutions do not match its fundamental needs. As Byman and Pollock point out, 'Even states with the right foundation can fail if the constitutional system it develops does not match its needs.' (2003: 127).

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