

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

Democracy in Iraq unlikely

Information from an Associated Press "Fact File, The state of Democracy in the Arab world" provides a run-down on some countries surrounding Iraq and their idea of "democracy."

Algeria. Multiparty state with elected parliament and president. National Liberation front, dominant party for 40 years, won 2002 parliamentary elections marred by violence.

Bahrain. Declared constitutional monarchy in 2002 as part of reforms that paved the way for first legislative elections in 30 years. Most power still resides with king, Sheik Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.

Egypt. President Hosni Mubarak took over from assassinated Anwar Sadat in 1981. His security apparatus and National Democratic party have almost absolute control over elected parliament. Mubarak periodically stands as only presidential candidate in referendums in which voters can say yes or no.

Jordan. King Abdullah II has virtually absolute power. Elected parliament has not met since 2001.

Kuwait. Politics controlled by Sheik Jaber Al Ahmed Al Sabah and family. Kuwait pioneered among Arabs in electing parliament in 1963, but emir regularly dismisses national assemblies. Women barred from participation.

Lebanon. Elections regular and lively, but not open because of power-sharing agreement meant to prevent resurgence of sectarian civil war. Legislative seats apportioned equally to Christians and Muslims; the prime minister must be Sunni, president Christian.

Libya. Moammar Gadhafi in absolute power since 1969 military coup.

Oman. Sultan Qaboos became ruler by overthrowing father in 1970. No political parties or elected legislature.

Qatar. Expected to have parliamentary elections in two or three years after holding first municipal election in 1999, with women fully participating.

Saudi Arabia. Crown Prince Abdullah rules on behalf of ailing King Fahd; no elected legislature.

Syria. President Bashar Assad wields near-absolute power.

Tunisia. Republic dominated by single party, ironically named Constitutional Democratic Assembly. Opposition parties allowed since 1981.

United Arab Emirates. Federation of states, each controlled by own emir and family.

Yemen. President Ali Abdullah Saleh presides. Despite constitution and elected parliament, power rests with military and tribes.

Not very encouraging information, is it? One hears various answers to the question, "How long will Americans be in Iraq?" Answers have varied from six months to five years. In Iraq and surrounding Arab countries there is no history or understanding of democracy. And there seems to be little comprehension or acceptance of Arab history by our American leaders.

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