

IRAQ PROGRAM PROFILE



History of Partnership

The House Democracy Partnership approved a legislative strengthening partnership with Iraq in July 2011. The program is designed to focus on committee operations (with a specific emphasis on public hearings and legislative oversight of the executive branch), constituent outreach, assistance to the research department, and strengthening the legislature's budget analysis capacity.

Accomplishments

- Peer-to-peer assistance to Iraqi legislators both in Washington and in Baghdad, focused on committee operations.
- Constituent relations program in Erbil, in northern Iraq.
- Formal visit by U.S. legislators to the Council of Representatives.

Background

After the regime of Saddam Hussein was deposed, and rule by the Coalition Provisional Authority and an interim Iraqi government, a new constitution took effect in October 2005, and a constitutionally based government took office in March 2006. Iraq is now in the latter stages of a transition from the dictatorship of Saddam to a multiparty parliamentary democracy that encompasses varying regional and religious sects and ideological and political factions.

Since its first election for a transitional National Assembly in January 2005, Iraq has held three largely free and fair national elections. The most recent of these, the March 2010 elections for the Council of Representatives (COR), resulted in a narrow plurality of seats (91) for former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's secular Iraqi National Movement (INM, or "Iraqiyya") bloc, with incumbent Prime Minister Nuri Maliki's State of Law bloc winning 89 seats. Because no party won a clear majority in parliament, the results were highly contentious and led to a lengthy delay in the formation of a new government.

The COR is comprised of 325 members elected from their home provinces on open party lists. At least one-quarter of the members must be female and ten seats are reserved for minorities.

Congressional Delegations

A delegation of five Members of Congress, led by House Democracy Partnership Chairman David Dreier, inaugurated HDP's partnership with Iraq in Baghdad on October 1 and 2, 2011. The Partnership held its first official meeting with members and staff representing the Committee on Foreign Affairs, where the technical needs of the Iraqi Parliament were discussed. This was followed by meetings with the Chairman of the Human Rights Committee and the Chairman of the Higher Education Committee, who added their insights into what the Council needed to become a more effective legislature. The delegation stressed the importance of oversight of the executive branch and the ability to use the

budget process to advance the legislature's goals. On October 2, the delegation traveled north to Erbil to visit the constituency of two Members of the Council of Representatives to discuss constituent services. The delegation learned that these members provide a great deal of services to their constituents but receive very little backing from the government in support of their efforts.

MP Seminars

In March 2011, two Members of the Iraqi Council of Representatives participated as observers in a Washington, D.C., based seminar on strengthening committee operations in a legislature, with a focus on public hearings and legislative oversight of the executive. The MPs heard from over a dozen of their peers in the U.S. House of Representatives, learned about the U.S. committee system from the Congressional Research Service, were introduced to budget analysis by the Congressional Budget Office, and were exposed to media and constituent relations by other speakers.

Staff Seminars

In January 2012, two staff members participated in a training seminar on legislative research and analysis. They were joined by colleagues from 12 other HDP partner countries. The parliamentary staff institute included presentations and discussions with Members of Congress and top officials from the Congressional Research Service (CRS). Current and former CRS staff provided the participants an overview of basic legislative research and analysis techniques including identifying sources of information, basic policy analysis, developing alternatives for the legislature, and conducting impact analysis.