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Remember the Refugees

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RECOMMENDATIONS for how to ensure the best outcome in Iraq are politically easy -- and thus plentiful. Our moral responsibility as a nation, however, requires that we prepare for the worst even as we work and hope for the best.

What we want is a peaceful political settlement among the Iraqis that will provide a stable government as we withdraw. What we may well get is local or even regional violence as part of a power struggle that will determine on what terms that settlement is reached. The possibilities include sectarian massacres, feuding warlords and attempted secession by Iraqi provinces.

Staring these prospects in the face is not pessimistic; it is prudent. And those of us who did not oppose the war have an extra obligation to be as sober as we can in our assessment of the probabilities.

We must begin by taking care of those Iraqis who have risked their lives for the vision of a new country that we promised them. We should drastically increase the immigration quotas for Iraqi translators and others who want to come to the United States, complete with continuing resettlement assistance once they arrive. We should work with the "coalition of the willing" and with countries in the region to do likewise.

We must plan to create safe corridors for the refugees fleeing Baghdad and other areas, and we must talk to all countries in the region, including Iran and Syria, about temporary resettlement plans for these refugees.

As Gen. David Petraeus reminds us, we are trying to buy time for a political settlement. In the end, that is up to the Iraqi leaders. We cannot save them from themselves. But we can do everything we can to help the millions of Iraqis who are likely to be trying to get out of the way.