

fundamental issues, they and the United States are in full agreement: We all, especially the nationalist insurgents, want Iraq to be free of foreign jihadists, and we all want U.S. troops out of the country as soon as possible.

Most importantly, however, this so-called “stability first” plan will require an ideological shift in the way the Bush administration conceives of the war. In short, it means abandoning once and for all the fiction that the war in Iraq is the principal front in the war on terrorism. As all but the most ideologically obstinate (read: Dick Cheney) now concede, Iraq is nothing of the sort. And the sooner the United States divorces the two, the sooner it can get its troops out of Iraq and refocus its energies on actually fight-

ing the rapid surge of jihadism throughout the Muslim world—the most devastating legacy of the war in Iraq. With the search for weapons of mass destruction called off, the pursuit of a U.S.-inspired democracy abandoned, and the master plan to rebuild the Middle East permanently shelved, there is but one measure of victory left in Iraq: a safe and speedy withdrawal of U.S. forces, but one that would leave behind a strong and stable federal government. It’s time to focus on fixing the Iraq we have, rather than imagining the Iraq we want. ■

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ever positive recommendations come out of the Baker-Hamilton Commission, the administration should make clear that phased withdrawal is the alternative—and be prepared to follow through.

Against this backdrop, we and the European Union—and possibly the Russians, although Russia has a strong incentive to keep the entire Middle East on a low boil in order to maintain high oil prices—should organize an Iraqi peace conference, inviting representatives of the Shia, Kurdish, and Sunni communities within Iraq, as well as Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and some of the Gulf states. Plenty of diplomatic ground will have to be plowed first, but we should be able to convene a conference by January. The most important task for the United States is to make unequivocally clear that this is the last chance for all parties to negotiate while U.S. troops are still in Iraq.

An agreement that will stick, however, requires more than undesirable alternatives. We need real carrots, big enough to convince armed camps to disarm and to cooperate in the long, slow slog of rebuilding Iraq. The first could be a Saudi-financed public-works and jobs program for Iraqi civilians. The militia bosses who are offering protection today could be handing out jobs and construction contracts instead. Second would be an amended constitution that guarantees more regional autonomy for different areas within Iraq, combined with a strong enough central government to secure and disburse oil revenue. Third is a regional security forum that would be sponsored by the United States and the European Union to provide a structured and ongoing opportunity for all participants, including Iran and Syria, to negotiate mutual security assurances. Fourth is an EU offer to Iran to help develop its gas fields as an alternative to Russian energy supplies. And fifth would be an offer of *more* U.S. troops to secure and reconstruct Baghdad—for a defined time period and only if the peace agreement holds.

At the same time, the United States should engage other actors within Iraq who have been largely ignored, such as leaders of tribes with many mixed Sunni-Shia marriages and professional associations of doctors and lawyers that could unite Iraqis based on common careers rather than creeds. As American political scientists have long known, a large part of the stability of any representative gov-

## ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER FORCE EVERYONE TO THE TABLE

**I**T’S TIME TO MAKE A VIRTUE OF NECESSITY in Iraq. The country is sliding into full-blown civil war. The government is weak and getting weaker by the day; it also shows little willingness to make the minimum commitments necessary for stability—amending the constitution to guarantee Sunnis their share of national oil revenue, allowing lower-level Baathist officials to be rehabilitated, and disarming the militias.

The Bush administration and many Democrats have been strenuously resisting these conclusions. But they may, in fact, be our most valuable diplomatic asset. If we accept this reality and plan accordingly, suddenly the tables turn. If we pull out, Iran has a civil war on its borders, as do Syria and Saudi Arabia. All have good reasons to fear this scenario. Suddenly, instead of the United States being tied down in Iraq and thus unable to play a broader role in the region, *Iran* would find itself tied down in Iraq and thus unable to play a broader role in the region, while the United States could go back to being a regional power broker. Syria would likely see an increased flow of refugees as chaos in Iraq worsened. Saudi Arabia would need to contend with the threat posed by Iranian influence among Iraqi Shia. And all three would have to worry about the possibility of Al Qaeda gaining a permanent foothold in Iraq.

As for the warring parties within Iraq,

they, too, have plenty of reason to fear a U.S. withdrawal. If we leave, the Shia will have to engage in all-out civil war without the protection of 150,000 U.S. troops. That is a decidedly worse situation than waging a covert civil war under the protection of U.S. forces—which is what the Shia are doing now. The Sunni insurgents will lose the propaganda value of attacking a foreign occupier and will have to recognize that, with U.S. troops gone, Iran would be free to use its oil riches to back the Shia to the hilt. As a result, Sunni forces would face the equivalent of Hezbollah on steroids. And the Kurds, much as they would like formal partition granting them statehood in everything but name, will understand that, without U.S. troops, places like Kirkuk will become bloody battlefields. Equally important, Turkey will no longer be deterred from sending in troops to chase alleged Kurdish terrorists.

In other words, the terrible conditions in Iraq—and the likelihood these conditions would worsen if we left—ultimately could be what allows us to save the country. The United States should announce that we are pulling out unless all parties within and outside Iraq come to the table and hammer out an enforceable peace settlement. Our commitment to withdrawing is newly credible, thanks to the recent midterm elections and the installation of a new secretary of defense. What-

ernment depends on cross-cutting cleavages, hampering the formation of extremist blocs. If we can somehow stop the violence, Iraq still, even now, has the building blocks of a diverse, law-abiding, prosperous society.

And if it doesn't work? If Iraq's various communities and neighbors refuse to cooperate with such a conference? Then we must follow through on our threat to withdraw—more or less. A humanitarian option just short of immediate withdrawal would be to allow as many Iraqi civilians as possible to move to safety behind U.S. troops—neighborhood by neighborhood in Baghdad and province by province in other parts of the country. This would require some U.S. troops to stay in Iraq, at least until the Iraqi army is strong enough to protect these areas. We might also leave enough troops on the

borders of Kurdistan and any other area we can realistically protect to create safe routes for fleeing civilians.

This is a strategically unattractive and morally wrenching scenario. But it need not come to pass. Instead of insisting that U.S. troops and Iraqi security forces are making progress, we might try acknowledging just how bad things are. Iraqis and their neighbors would then take seriously our threat to leave. Perhaps by recognizing reality in Iraq, we will manage to avoid making things worse—and with luck, humility, and hard work, we might just manage to make them better. ■

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## LARRY DIAMOND DEAL WITH THE SUNNIS

**T**HE UNITED STATES IS IN A quagmire in Iraq because it rushed to war, and then to occupation, without a plan or even a realistic assessment. We must not exit Iraq in the same blind fashion.

We need a plan to stabilize Iraq politically before we exit. Any such plan must have numerous military, economic, and political dimensions. But a key feature should be to split up the Sunni Arab insurgency. This insurgency is already deeply divided between secular (nationalist, Baathist) and religious elements and—within the latter—between Islamists focused on Iraq and hardcore utopian revolutionaries (Salafists like Al Qaeda) who see a U.S. defeat in Iraq as the first step in a global jihadist war. As the Iraqi conflict has worn on, the radical Salafists have become more powerful, more dynamic, and more homegrown. If the United States simply races for the exits, they could make western Iraq a terrorist state-within-a-state like what Al Qaeda built in Afghanistan.

While some American officials have met with insurgent representatives, these talks never have been serious enough to yield anything. We need to negotiate a deal that will induce the tactical insurgents and their tribal networks to turn on the jihadists and crush them, and then

stabilize their own region and restrain the larger violence. Such an agreement is possible because the nationalist and Baathist Sunni insurgents want—like the United States—to prevent an Al Qaeda victory in Iraq; they view Iran, not us, as their strategic enemy; and they want a deal that gives them a meaningful share of power and resources.

To get a deal, we need to give reassurances to the nationalist and Baathist Sunnis. First, President Bush must openly disavow any intention of seeking permanent military bases in Iraq. The widespread belief that we are seeking them powerfully motivates Iraqi nationalist resistance (including from radical Shia militias). Second, we need to establish some kind of timetable for U.S. military withdrawal (or at least very substantial drawdown). It need not be immediate. Fearing an Iranian takeover, many Sunni Arab insurgents might accept a timetable stretched over two to three years and keyed to events on the ground. Finally, we have to keep pressing the other Iraqi parties for concessions on outstanding national issues: the federal structure of the country, control over oil, division of the oil wealth, and some rollback of de-Baathification. (Any agreement would also require amnesty for most insurgents, as

well as militia fighters.)

At the same time, we must deal directly and more boldly with the constitutional stalemate. Particularly infuriating for Sunni Arabs are the provisions that allow for the formation of a Shia super-region, spanning all nine southern provinces (half the country). With about 70 percent of Iraq's oil deep in the Shia south—and much of the rest in and around Kirkuk, which the Kurds are determined to incorporate—the Sunnis see this as a formula for their defeat. Intense constitutional bargaining is needed to clearly establish the central government's lead role in managing the oil fields; to eliminate the possibility of forming one big, dominant Shia super-region; and to craft a fair and internationally guaranteed formula for dividing the country's oil and gas revenue among the different parts of the country.

Such a diplomatic strategy for rescuing Iraq cannot be managed by the United States alone. We lack the legitimacy, the leverage, and the trust to pull it off. To save Iraq, we must internationalize the mediation effort, bringing in the European Union and the United Nations as full partners. This joint effort could then reach out to engage the neighboring Arab states (including Syria), the Arab League, Turkey, and—not least—Iran. If a viable deal is going to be struck to stabilize Iraq, everyone will have to make concessions. The neighboring Arab states will have to put pressure on the Sunni Arabs, the Iranians on the Shia religious parties, and the Americans on the Kurds. To get the Syrians and the Iranians to press for compromise in Iraq, the United States itself will have to talk directly with them and address their concerns that we are seeking more “regime change.”

If it seems that Syria and Iran, and all the internal troublemakers, have the upper hand in Iraq, ponder this: The chaos in Iraq that was good for them in the past now risks spilling over borders and threatening, rather than insulating, the neighboring regimes. Iran—a multinational state that is barely half Persian—must worry about the implications for its own stability of Iraq disintegrating into ethnic pieces. Syria faces a formidable threat from its own Islamic radicals. So do the other Arab neighbors. Thus, there remains scope for a deal, because each of the major players faces serious risks if Iraq disintegrates. These anxieties give the United States leverage that it has so

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