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One View of the United States and Iraq

by Max Singer

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The story of the Unite States and Iraq since 2003 has become very complex, and cannot be separated from understanding broader Middle Eastern and jihad issues. This paper is one person's view of the whole set of issues and how they connect to each other.

Much of this paper contradicts the generally understood facts of the Iraq story. It is a picture of Iraq that few people have seen before, because nobody is presenting this story. If you look at only one piece of the picture you won't be able to see how someone could have such a peculiar idea. If you look at the whole picture, while you may not be convinced, you may see that it reflects not ignorance of "what everybody knows" but a reasonably complete and consistent view, including specific reasons for rejecting the common views. In other words the claim is that this is a coherent story, with some reasons to believe it might be correct; it is not proof of the key controversial factual judgments. You owe it to yourself to look at this alternative picture before you decide that your picture is right.

The Decision to Remove Saddam Hussein

A. The first reason to remove Saddam was that doing so was a key to preventing the attempted jihad which had reached a climax on 9/11 from becoming a "real jihad," that is, much larger than it has been. This reason depends on a view of the jihad threat and how to defeat it. My understanding is as follows.

Osama Bin Laden and others have called to the Muslim world saying, "we are starting a jihad (holy war) against the West, especially the U.S.; you should join us." So far most of the Muslim world has not joined the jihad, although many millions sympathize with it. The primary goal of the U.S. must be to convince Muslims—primarily Muslim governments—not to join the jihad that Osama and others are trying to start. If several big Muslim countries decide to support jihad then the US will not be able to prevent jihadists who wish to attack the U.S. from having save havens where they can organize, recruit, and train terrorists. Such safe havens make the problem of protecting against terrorist attacks against the U.S. much more difficult. We might very well have to deal with several 9/11s per year, and an increasing danger of an attack with a nuclear weapon. There are of course some safe havens now, but they depend on being in very awkward and difficult places, which reduces their value, they are not completely safe, and we are working on shutting them down.

The key issue for U.S. policy is which of two alternative approaches we should use to convince Arab governments and other Muslims not to support jihad. (Policy will inevitably involve a complex mix of the two alternatives, but we have to decide which is primary.) To put it in harsh terms, one approach emphasizes buying Arab support; the

other emphasizes compelling it. The approach of the State Department emphasizes the first by trying to convince the Arab governments that we are not their enemy, that we are not in conflict with their essential interests, that we care about their concerns, and that we have parallel interests. In other words State believes we need to buy Arab support.

The alternative approach is to try to convince Arab governments—by our actions—of three things. First that we are so strong and determined that jihad cannot win. Second that jihad is dangerous for Muslim communities that support it. Third that the U.S. will work to do political damage to governments who do not meet two demands: (i) exclude terrorists from your country and don't support them elsewhere, and (ii) refrain from acquiring nuclear weapons.

In the long run there has to be a battle of ideas within Muslim communities about jihad and about compatibility of Islam with other societies. This debate or conflict within Islam will last at least a generation. But in the short run the only possible way to convince enough Muslims not to support jihad is to demonstrate to them that jihad now is hopeless and dangerous—whether or not Islam requires rejection or ultimate defeat for the West.

This is not my diagnosis. It is what I have concluded from the writings of leading experts in Islam and the Middle East, such as Bernard Lewis, Fouad Ajami, Daniel Pipes, Amir Taheri, Hillel Fradkin and others.

What is the significance of this analysis for Iraq, one of the two leading countries in the Arab world. In 2002, as the United States had to begin to demonstrate that Arab governments must support the fight against jihadist terrorism, Saddam Hussein was the leading overt enemy of the U.S. in the Arab world. (Iran was the leading non-Arab enemy of the U.S.) It would be futile for the U.S. to demand that Arab countries eject terrorists if the Saddam regime, which openly flouted the U.S., remained in power. (For the U.S. to request, instead of demand, Arab support for a major U.S. need, such as the fight against jihadist terrorism, would have been seen as a sign of weakness, and would receive no more than lip service; although of course demands are best framed as requests, and Arab governments have no trouble telling the difference.) If Saddam could boldly defy the U.S., why should other Arab countries cause themselves internal difficulties to satisfy U.S. needs? Therefore the first requirement for the U.S. to be able to influence Arab states was to remove Saddam.

Why didn't President Bush use this argument? Think about the diplomatic issues that would have been involved if he had done so.

B. The second reason to remove Saddam was that it could be done without establishing a precedent of the United States arbitrarily removing a government. Because the 1991 war with Iraq had not finally ended, and Saddam had grossly violated the ceasefire agreement, Iraq did not have the normal right to be free from attack. And it was in violation of numerous UN Article 7 demands. It had, in effect, become an outlaw state. For the U.S. to demonstrate its power and determination by removing Saddam did not mean that the U.S. was claiming the right to attack whoever it felt was in its way.

C. The third reason to remove Saddam was his programs to acquire biological and nuclear weapons. It turns out that the view that was shared by the U.S. administration, the previous U.S. administration, Democratic Congressional leaders, foreign intelligence agencies, and leading Iraqi generals, that Saddam had or was very close to getting nuclear and/or biological weapons, seems to have been wrong. He clearly had chemical weapons because he had used them, and there has been some indication that a number of truckloads of such weapons were sent to Syria shortly before the attack on Iraq.

All the reasons that so many people have come to understand why it would be unacceptable for Iran to acquire nuclear weapons apply equally to Iraq. The most modest of these reasons to fear Saddam having nuclear or biological weapons is the possibility that he might provide some to terrorists.

It seems to me that the argument that "Bush lied" or distorted the evidence is contemptible. His conclusion that Saddam had or was close to getting nuclear weapons was shared by everyone, and it is very clear that it is a conclusion that Bush believed. It is completely unreasonable to argue that Bush knew or suspected that Saddam had no nuclear weapons but claimed that he did to support his own decision to go to war. Among other things, it was clear that the decision to go to war was politically dangerous. Bush didn't go to war because it was good for his political position, but because he genuinely believed that it was necessary for U.S. security. Certainly one can debate whether his conclusion was correct—either post hoc or at the time it was made—but I see little reason for believing that it was a corrupt decision. This paper deals with the question of policy on the merits, not in terms of evaluating President Bush's character or his presentation of arguments.

D. The fourth reason to remove Saddam was the help he had given to international terrorists and the danger that he would give more. Also, the example he was setting of a country rejecting the U.S. demand not to support international terrorists.

Opponents of President Bush argue that Saddam had "no operational tie" to terrorist organizations. They say that there was no record of Saddam providing more than trivial help to terrorists. But this argument ignores the report of CIA Director George Tenet to Congress and much other evidence. Some of the argument is just hair splitting about whether the connections and help Iraq had provided to terrorists amounted to an "operational link" or some other arbitrary standard. For example, the 9-11 Commission's "Staff Statement 15," finding that there was "no credible evidence that Iraq and al Qaeda cooperated on attacks against the United States." The question was whether Iraq worked with international terrorists, not whether they had cooperated on attacks against the US. The administration never claimed that Saddam was responsible for 9/11.

There has been so much dispute about the evidence on this, much of it centered around Stephen Hayes book *Connection,* which describes the public evidence of extensive Iraqi cooperation with Al Qaeda and other international terrorists, that it would do no good for

me to give examples here since the validity of each item involves three rounds of arguments back and forth.

The judgment that it is clear that Saddam's regime had substantial cooperation with international terrorists is reinforced by the simple question, "why not?" Some have argued that since he was secular there would not be cooperation with Islamist terrorists such as Al Qaeda, but this old idea, once popular in the CIA, has clearly been refuted. Does anyone think that Saddam was too moral or law-abiding to work with terrorists? The only prudent assumption is that Saddam might well help any enemy of his enemy, certainly including international terrorists. This normal assumption is consistent with much evidence of specific cooperation.

This area is typical of much of the argument about Iraq. The opponents say, "Bush (or Cheney) exaggerated the evidence." Or the administration failed to clearly present its case. Or it followed the wrong procedures in trying to learn the facts. But there's no need to get into any arguments about how the Bush administration talked. The question is what is true. A prudent judgment of the character and record of the Saddam regime leads to the conclusion that there was a serious chance that in some circumstances that regime might provide biological or nuclear weapons to terrorists, and that this was a good additional reason to remove Saddam from power.

E. The fifth reason to remove Saddam was that he was a vicious, totalitarian tyrant, guilty of immense crimes against the Iraqi people. Opponents argue that there are lots of tyrants around and the U.S. has no business removing a government just because it isn't democratic. True enough. But there are very few tyrants as bad as Saddam was, by many measures. And there was an unusually strong and representative group of Iraqis calling for help in removing Saddam—of which more later. And while his evil tyranny by itself would not have justified the U.S. to remove Saddam, it certainly was a strong supporting reason with the other considerations.

The fact that the U.S. is not willing to remove other dictators, even ones who may be as bad as Saddam was, is not a reason to reject taking Saddam's crimes against Iraqis as an additional important incentive for a decision to remove him. One does not have to pick up all the garbage to justify cleaning up one piece. While we can't take responsibility for removing all evil tyrants we can be proud that we care to remove one when the circumstances make it appropriate to do so.

F. It should be noted that this list of reasons for removing Saddam does not include the goal of spreading democracy in the Middle East. While that goal is important it clearly does not generally justify forcefully removing undemocratic governments. The U.S. needs to be a witness for the value of democracy and to do at least something to encourage its spread. And it is probably true that the Middle East will not cease to be a source of violence and instability until it becomes a good deal more democratic than it is today. But this is a goal that must be pursued prudently, with limited measures, over at least a generation. And there is no clear standard for deciding how the goal of advancing democracy should be integrated with other goals and considerations which must be

pursued simultaneously. The choice is not between making the spread of democracy the dominating highest priority of U.S. policy or else excluding the pursuit of democracy from our list of policy considerations. The proper approach is continuously to decide how to integrate the promotion of democracy with other goals and requirements of policy.

So promoting democracy should not have been a primary reason for removing Saddam—and the evidence is that it was not—although the possibility of advancing democracy also supported the case for removing Saddam. In his book *War and Decision* Douglas Feith, DoD Undersecretary for Policy at the time, presents strong evidence from the contemporaneous internal documents that the goal of spreading democracy was not an important part of the reason the Bush administration decided to remove Saddam. And Feith later argued that it was a mistake, 4 or 5 months after the war began, for the White House to begin emphasizing the objective of bringing democracy to Iraq, which had not been primary in the original decision-making, and had received much less emphasis in the President's speeches before then.

G. There were also tactical arguments against going against Saddam, principally that Iran was the more dangerous enemy and that the U.S. should have dealt with Iran before dealing with Saddam. My own view at the time was that either one could come first. Saddam's "outlaw status" was a good reason for choosing Iraq first. Also the existence of a strong, representative, united Iraqi opposition movement—which did not exist for Iran—was another reason for Iraq first. Also, since Iran was much less totalitarian than Iraq there was a reason to think that Iran's internal opposition might before too long remove the Iranian regime, and therefore the U.S. should act first against Iraq. When Iranian popular opposition coalesced and was ready to move against the regime it would stand a better chance of being able to succeed with less help from the U.S. But it had not coalesced by 2002. Also Iraq was the easier target, partly because it had a much smaller population. None of these arguments are conclusive. There certainly are arguments the other way. It was a tactical choice and no one can reach a strong conclusion that either choice was much better than the other. The mistake that was made was to fail to act on the understanding that Iraq was a regional war and that it was dangerous if not impossible to fight it without dealing with Syrian and Iranian participation.

What Should Have Happened After Saddam's Removal

Here is where the United States probably made its biggest mistake: turning the liberation of Iraq into the occupation of Iraq. While the President is responsible for all the decisions of the U.S. government, this issue cannot be fully appreciated without looking into the roles of different components of the Bush administration in the evolution of U.S. policy concerning what should happen after Saddam's removal.

The key fact, for the question of what should have been done after Saddam, is a unique feature of the Iraqi situation in 2001 and 2002. That unique fact was that there was a united representative Iraqi opposition movement with an extraordinarily competent leader who was a strong and sophisticated believer in democracy.

Since WWII there have been many tyrannies in the world. In almost every case these dictatorships have produced exile opposition groups. (Sometimes there are internal opposition movements too, depending on how totalitarian the dictator's regime is.) In virtually every case the exiles are strongly divided, with various elements fighting each other as much or more than they are fighting the dictator. Also, usually the most effective opponents of the dictator are nearly as objectionable as the dictator himself. As a result of this long bitter experience with exile and other opposition movements much of the American leadership naturally assumed that not much could be expected of Saddam's Iraqi opponents. They missed the fact that Iraq was an exception to the usual rule.

The Iraqi exile opposition movement, the Iraqi National Congress, and especially its leader, Ahmad Chalabi, have been extraordinarily controversial for more than a decade. Since that controversy has been central to much of what happened in Iraq, and what might have happened, we need to consider it at some length here.

The Controversy over Ahmad Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress

The two main contestants concerning United States' decisions about Iraq were on one side the State Dept. and the CIA and on the other the Office of Secretary of Defense (OSD) in the Defense Department, often supported by the Vice President. A generally less important player on political issues was CentCom, the unified military command responsible for the Middle East which was commanded by Gen. Zinni and then Gen. Tommy Franks and later Gen Abizaid.

While CentCom reports to the President through the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, it is a large, strong, and very independent organization. Because of the principle of keeping the field command that is responsible for running battles free from interference by staff officers in headquarters, the connection between CentCom and its bosses is only at the top, between the CentCom commanding general and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the Secretary of Defense. Lower level officials in the Pentagon are not supposed to be in touch with CentCom staff. So in practice, on "political" aspects of daily operations, CentCom is more influenced by its own civilian Polads (political advisers) and intelligence advisors who are part of CentCom, and who normally are former foreign service officers or intelligence officers, than it is by the OSD, despite the Secretary's command authority.

Beginning in the late '90s State and CIA and CentCom were strongly anti-Chalabi and it is important to understand the real sources of their antagonism which was partly bureaucratic or institutional and partly based on policy conceptions. This opposition explains most of the accusations against Chalabi to this day.

Ahmad Chalabi came from a wealthy and politically powerful old Iraqi family. His father and uncle had been cabinet ministers and political leaders. The family had a position in

the Shiite world comparable to that of the Rothschild family in the Jewish world. They were forced to leave Baghdad as a result of the Baath Party coup in 1958 when Ahmad was 14 years old. Ahmad got his undergraduate education at MIT and went on to get a Ph.D in mathematics at the University of Chicago. Rejecting an opportunity to teach mathematics at MIT he moved to Lebanon to teach in university there, where much of his family had moved and where he met his wife, Leila, the daughter of a prominent Shiite family in Lebanon.

Two things are unusual about Ahmad Chalabi. First he is extraordinarily brilliant and broadly learned. Second he is a man of both the East and the West. He has absorbed both modern Western instincts for efficiency and organization and the ethical and political norms of liberal democracy. But he continues to have a deep feeling for the Arab culture of the Middle East and he relates to and negotiates with Arab leaders in their own ways. He knows Baghdad politics the way Mayor Curley knew Boston politics. Much of it is family politics, and Chalabi talks to many Iraqi politicians on the basis of several generations of family connections.

After the first Iraq war in 1991 the CIA, which was working to produce an Iraqi army coup that would remove Saddam Hussein, decided that their efforts would be helped if there were a small Iraqi political opposition movement to put some pressure on Saddam's regime, and they provided funding to Chalabi to create such an organization. Instead of building a small tame organization that would do CIA's bidding, Chalabi instead built a broad, independent Iraqi national movement—the Iraqi National Congress (INC) committed to replacing Saddam's regime with an independent civilian Iraqi federal national government, and including within itself all major segments of Iraqi society and all parts of the Iraqi political spectrum.

There is a confusing ambiguity about the name INC. The name was used simultaneously for two overlapping groups. The broad INC—representing all Iraqis opposed to Saddam Hussein—had as its major members two major Shiite organizations, the two Kurdish parties, various Sunni representatives, the heir to the last King of Iraq, and the Iraqi National Accord, which was the CIA-organized and controlled group led by Ayad Allawi. This broad INC had hundreds of individual members and was open to all Iraqis, regardless of their political views or background. There was no serious alternative opposition group. Everybody who counted was in this broad INC. As in democratic countries the differences were expressed within the overall umbrella of the national movement, the Iraqi National Congress.

But the name INC was also used by the component of the broad INC which was Chalabi's personal alliance, mostly representing non-sectarian liberal elements of Iraqi politics. The confusing thing is that the "little" INC of Chalabi was one of the major members of the big, or broad INC of which Chalabi as an individual was the chosen leader. From now on we will use "Iraqi National Congress" to refer to the broad INC, and "INC" to refer to Chalabi's smaller component of the Iraqi National Congress. Once the U.S. occupation began it dealt with the components of the Iraqi National Congress separately and the Iraqi National Congress became essentially defunct and the name INC

was used almost only for the smaller Chalabi group. In brief, before 2003 the Iraqi National Congress was a broad national movement with major organizational components, and after 2003 the INC was Chalabi's personal non-sectarian democratic political organization.

By 1996 the Iraqi National Congress operating in the Kurdish north of Iraq had created a small military force and made plans with the two Kurdish military forces to attack the Iraqi division opposite the Kurdish border, hoping to begin a broader uprising that would remove Saddam. Initially this plan was supported by some local CIA representatives, but the day before the attack Tony Lake, the Deputy United States National Security Adviser, sent a message to Iraq saying that the U.S. would not support the attack. Although this attack destroyed the Iraqi division that it targeted, no follow up was possible because of the U.S. decision to withdraw support. Subsequently Saddam sent a multi-division armored force to attack the Iraqi National Congress in Kurdistan, capturing and killing many Iraqi National Congress people and destroying its bases and headquarters. The US government removed a large number of other Iraqi National Congress personnel by air to Guam and subsequently to the United States.

Later that year Chalabi learned from his covert sources within the Saddam regime that Saddam knew about the major CIA plan for a coup against him and that he would shortly act against the plotters. Chalabi went to Washington and reported this to his friend Richard Perle, a former Ass't Secretary of Defense. Perle took Chalabi to John Deutsch, Director of the CIA at the time, so that Chalabi could personally warn him that the CIA coup plan was compromised. Deutsch assigned George Tenet to look into this warning and Tenet reported that the warning was false and that CIA should go ahead with its plans. Six weeks later Saddam seized the plotters and used their CIA supplied radio to make fun of the CIA. Tenet subsequently became head of the CIA.

In brief, the CIA Middle East division had a strong antagonism to Chalabi because they expect organizations they pay to do what they are told, not to be independent, and because the Iraqi National Congress was involved in the embarrassment of their failed coup attempt. (Although some of the individual CIA personnel directly involved with Chalabi are still among his strong supporters.)

The State Department also has bureaucratic reasons for antagonism to Chalabi. In President Clinton's second term—if not before—Clinton made it clear to State that he would like the Department as much as possible to keep the Iraq issue from becoming too prominent. So State's intention was to keep the Iraq issue on the back burner so that it would not require Presidential attention. Then Chalabi came to Washington and, with a variety of American allies, helped to convince the Congress to pass the Iraqi Liberation Act with large majorities in both houses, against State Department opposition. This Act, which was signed by President Clinton, declared that it was U.S. policy to seek the removal of Saddam Hussein. The Department doesn't like it when a foreigner conducts a program to convince the Congress that State is wrong about a foreign policy—especially when Congress agrees with the upstart and not with the Department.

More importantly, State and CIA also had deep policy reasons for antagonism to Chalabi. In 2002 both organizations believed that the U.S. national interest in stability in the region required that Iraq be ruled by a Sunni military dictator. They believed that anyone who understood the history and real character of the region and of the Iraqi people knew that consensual government and an open political process could not work in Iraq. They also believed that a Shiite-led government in Iraq would be bad for the United States, because it would be destabilizing and would be dominated by Iran. Since a solid majority of Iraq's population was Shiite, the only realistic possibility, they thought, was for Iraq to be ruled by a dictator representing the Sunni minority. They both believed that the idea of creating anything like a democratic political process for Iraq was foolishly naïve. Therefore they had contempt for the idea that the Iraqi National Congress led by Chalabi should become the government of Iraq because Chalabi was a Shiite leading a broad Iraqi national movement that proposed to install a democratic central government for a federal Iraq in which Iraq's Kurdish and Sunni minorities would have substantial autonomy.

The State-CIA view of policy for Iraq was shared by most European diplomats and by most experts in the Middle East (not including Bernard Lewis and some others). The common view was the following: Iraq is an artificial country created by Europeans, and Iraqis have little sense of Iraqi national identity, identifying instead with their ethnic or religious group and their tribe. Iraqis are too violent and have too little experience of compromise to sustain a government based on consensual politics rather than on military force. The Sunni minority was the natural ruler of Iraq and wouldn't tolerate being removed from control. The Shiites did not have what it takes to rule Iraq and they would be dominated by Iran which was a much larger Shiite country. Without a powerful authoritarian government there would be a civil war between Sunnis and Shia. There was no chance that anything like democracy could work in Iraq—at least until many years in the future. Chalabi, and others familiar with Iraq, gave reasons for disagreeing with each of these basic conclusions, and as we shall see later, they seem to have been much more nearly right than the prevailing wisdom.

Another source of State and CIA policy antagonism to Chalabi was their long and broad relationships with the Sunni dictatorships of the region—especially Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. This had two effects. First, State and CIA believed that the United States' interest in the stability of the region and need to gain regional support for the US depended on protecting the nearby Sunni dictatorships. They believed that whatever endangered those regimes was against U.S. interest, because it was believed that if those regimes fell they would be replaced by Islamic radicals. Second, the main personal relationships and sources of information of long-time State and CIA personnel in the region were the elites of the Sunni dictatorships. Much of the "old hands' " understanding of regional politics came from what they heard from their long-time contacts and sources, and most of these sources depended on the survival of the Sunni dictatorships. This "grapevine" passed onto the State and CIA experts all kinds of negative stories and judgments about Chalabi, because they were afraid to have Iraq led by a modern, democratic, Shiite Arab. These people didn't have a more suitable candidate to lead Iraq; but they knew they didn't like Chalabi and would say anything to prevent him from coming to power.

As a result of all these considerations the only policy or principle that State and CIA and the CentCom staff consistently and actively pursued concerning Iraqi politics from the beginning until now was, "anybody but Chalabi." This was the one thing they were sure about. They did not hesitate to do or say whatever they thought necessary to keep Chalabi from power. And they succeeded. Anyone who wants to evaluate various charges against Chalabi that have been circulated should take into account the fact that State and CIA have felt that they had very strong reasons to destroy his influence—and neither organization has a record of excessive scruples in dealing with foreigners who get in the way of what they see as U.S. interests.

There are of course many questions about Chalabi's actions since 2003. There have been many turns in Iraqi politics and his personal situation has often been quite delicate. We can't review all these issues, and in any case there is no reason to argue that Chalabi has been right about everything. In particular his relationship to Muqtada al Sadr is complicated and controversial. But the real debate about Chalabi was about his basic character—that is, was he an unscrupulous, small-time self-seeking operator, as he has been portrayed, or was he a world class Iraqi patriot, democrat, and statesman.

Aram Rostom, an American journalist, published a prominent book about Chalabi entitled *The Man Who Pushed America to War*—a common but false belief about Chalabi. Chalabi is frequently accused of knowingly providing false information to the United States about Iraqi nuclear weapons in order to induce the U.S. to remove Saddam. (Although two bipartisan Congressional groups rejected this charge.) He was accused by the CIA of being an agent of the Iranian government and of providing secret U.S. information to Iran. Rostom presents him as a shady financial operator motivated by efforts to restore his fortune. Gen. Zinni, the former commander of CentCom, described him as a Rolex-wearing playboy. He is frequently accused of being a tool of the Iranian regime.

On the other hand there are a number of very senior people who know Chalabi very well, some of them for many years, who believe him to be a man of great integrity, high moral and political standards, and extraordinary capability—although some of them have disagreed with him politically from time to time. This group includes Bernard Lewis, Prince Hassan of Jordan, Richard Perle, VP Cheney, Douglas Feith, Paul Wolfowitz, Fouad Ajami, Kanan Makiya, and former CIA Director James Woolsey—people of sophistication, experience, and scepticism.

The disagreement about Chalabi is not the normal kind of disagreement about a substantial public figure where some people emphasize good features and others pay more attention to weaknesses and limitations. Here some people understand Chalabi to be a small-time financial manipulator and self-seeking scoundrel, although with a high IQ, and other people see him as an Iraqi patriot and devoted democrat of high integrity and one of the most substantial and high quality people on the international political scene. Usually both sides are at least partially right; here either one group or the other is

profoundly wrong. Very few, if any, of those who see him as a small-time scoundrel have had much personal contact with him.

The major hard "evidence" against Chalabi is his conviction in absentia by a Jordanian military "court" of looting the Petra bank which he ran and of which he was the major shareholder. If the Jordanian charges against him are true then the people who see him as an outstanding man of integrity have been fooled.

Chalabi instituted a suit in Federal Court in Washington to try to litigate in the US court system the question of what happened with the Petra bank. This attempt was turned down on jurisdictional grounds. Chalabi argues that the Jordanian charges are completely false, and that King Hussein arranged these false charges because of pressure on him from Saddam Hussein, on whom the King was dependent. Chalabi points out that the first "court" (actually one high ranking officer in the Jordanian army) that spent months looking into the charges against his bank produced a two-foot thick set of reports concluding that the bank had been run properly. This report was rejected by King Hussein who appointed another officer to be the new "court." A few days later the replacement officer produced the report saying that Chalabi had defrauded the bank. Both a Hong Kong court and Interpol have refused to accept the decision of the Jordanian military "court."

Subsequently King Hussein went out of his way to meet publicly with Chalabi, which he would never have done if he believed that Chalabi was a criminal. And privately, before at least one witness, the King apologized to Chalabi for having to take his bank away.

While people who know Chalabi do not believe the Jordanian conviction was correct, these charges have hounded him ever since, and are a major reason why State and CIA have succeeded in limiting his influence on Iraqi politics. There are a few independent people who know the truth. These include Prince Hassan of Jordan, who was the Crown Prince at the time, probably the CIA station chief in Jordan at the time, and the Jordanian officer who was the first "court" to investigate the charges. The officers who helped manage the bank under Chalabi also know the truth, but their statements that the bank was operated properly are ignored because they are thought to be biased.

There are other kinds of claims made against Chalabi, particularly by those associated with Paul Bremer, who ran the United States occupation of Iraq. This argument is that Chalabi had no voter support among Iraqis, and that many Iraqi political leaders were against him. The issue of voter support is based on a failure to understand Iraqi politics during the first years after liberation. What mattered was not voter recognition but support by political leaders. Most voters in the first elections followed leaders of various kinds—tribal, religious, or political. Very few politicians had much voter recognition. Most people did not expect to choose on the basis of their personal reaction to candidates.

The charge that Chalabi was opposed by much of the political leadership in Iraq is very strange, since Bremer and all the U.S. ambassadors were completely convinced that Chalabi was by far the most effective Iraqi in getting needed legislation or other political

decisions made and they often depended on him to get the Iraqi support they needed. How could he be so effective if politicians didn't respect him? It is possible that Bremer heard from Iraqi politicians what they thought he wanted to hear.

Before the war State and CIA regularly claimed that the Iraqi opposition movement was very divided. Gen. Zinni famously testified that the Iraqi National Congress was just one of hundreds of exile opposition groups. And State kept talking about how it was making great efforts to unify the Iraqi opposition. The truth is the opposite; State went to great effort to break the unity of the Iraqi National Congress behind Ahmad Chalabi.

Naturally the Iraqi opposition movement was divided in the same sense that the American government and political leadership is divided. There were dozens of leaders involved, many with great egos and diverse constituencies and old personal antagonisms. But the Iraqi opposition movement—that is, the Iraqi National Congress—was able to reach agreement and make decisions when they had to. And they were united in accepting Ahmad Chalabi as their leader. This was not because they all liked Chalabi or had no grievances against him. They continually insisted on Chalabi as their leader because they knew that he was the most capable among them, that he was most effective in influencing the United States Congress, that he was a patriotic Iraqi devoted to their common purpose of removing Saddam Hussein, that he followed a policy of including and trying to give fair weight to all political views and elements in Iraqi life, and that there was no alternative leader who had remotely as much ability to hold the group together.

Despite numerous active efforts by State Department in 2000—2002 the Iraqi opposition movement insisted on keeping Chalabi as their leader, even though they knew that they would have an easier time with the State Department if they had a different leader. In the relationship between the U.S. and the Iraqi opposition it was the United States government that often spoke with two conflicting voices—DoD and State/CIA—and the Iraqi opposition that despite internal disagreements was able to make decisions. The main participants in the INC knew how difficult it was to keep their movement together and recognized that Chalabi had no competition in his ability to get agreement when necessary.

The Iraqi National Congress and the Development of the Iraqi Government

From the late '90s the Iraqi National Congress wanted to create an Iraqi opposition military force to attack Saddam. But this could only be done with governmental scale money and government approval for use of some location for training. No government was willing to cooperate without the approval of the United States, and the U.S. was against the Iraqi National Congress having an Iraqi military force. The Taiwan government was willing to secretly provide $5 million for this purpose if the U.S. did not object. Although a very senior State Department official told Chalabi that, if it were asked, State would make no objection to foreign contributions to the Iraqi National

Congress, when that official was unofficially asked by someone speaking for Taiwan, he indicated that the U.S. would prefer that Taiwan not provide money to the Iraqi National Congress.

Later, as preparations for the possibility of invading Iraq became more advanced, the DoD made several efforts to get approval to organize a small Iraqi military force to assist or support U.S. forces, but these were all vetoed by State Department or prevented by CentCom. Partly State argued that helping set up an opposition force was inconsistent with the fact that the President had not yet formally decided to liberate Iraq and was still giving diplomacy a chance. The real reason was almost certainly State's consistent policy of resisting anything that might strengthen Chalabi's position. State certainly was not worrying about how to govern Iraq effectively after a U.S. invasion.

And when finally State allowed some efforts to organize an Iraqi exile military force there were some difficulties in recruiting the force, but it isn't clear what the real source of the difficulties was.

No one can be sure what would have happened if things had been done differently. History follows only one path. But one can speculate about what might have happened if the President had rejected State and CIA's vetoes of close cooperation with the Iraqi National Congress.

In March 2003 the United States army would have entered Iraq in cooperation with a small Iraqi national military force acting under the authority of the Iraqi National Congress, which included all the major parties in the Iraqi opposition movement, all with active contacts with their constituencies in Iraq.

We don't need to consider how much of the military effort might have been borne by the Iraqi force. Obviously the United States didn't need any military help. But any force that came in with the U.S. and therefore could share in the credit for removing Saddam would have given the Iraqi National Congress serious prestige and authority among Iraqis, as well as enabling Iraqis to have the pride of liberating their own country, even though U.S. "assistance" was required. This moral authority, combined with the endorsement of the United States and the reputation of its own leaders with Iraqi groups, might well have enabled an Iraqi National Congress-led Iraqi interim government to be accepted by the great majority of Iraqis as a legitimate Iraqi government to which they could and should give at least their temporary support right after Saddam's overthrow. No one can know that this would have succeeded. Certainly there were divisions within the Iraqi National Congress—because it was so inclusive. But eventually Iraq had to be turned over to the Iraqis and there are good reasons for believing that it would have been easier for an Iraqi National Congress-led government in 2003 than in was for the Iraqi government elected in 2005 after all that had happened since 2003.

Even without the special skills and position of Ahmad Chalabi there probably would have been better results if an Iraqi interim government in some form—led by another INC member such as Ayad Allawi—has been installed rather than creating a CPA (Coalition

Provisional Authority) occupation of Iraq. That is, there is a good argument that any Iraqi would have been better than any American

There would have been violent opposition to such an Iraqi government—as to any government—from two sources: first Saddam Hussein and the Baathist bitter-enders, and second the international supporters of jihadist terrorism. This second group included two main streams which often cooperated with each other: the groups organized and supported by Iran, who were principally Shia, and various Sunni jihadists, many of whom were connected to or inspired by Al Qaeda, and who were helped by Syria (and at least tacitly often by Saudi Arabia). All of these groups were the main engine of the fight against the US and the Iraqi government it established until today. Although after the United States established itself as an occupier of Iraq—not a liberator supporting an Iraqi government—the jihadists and Baathists were joined in their attack by a much larger number of Iraqis fighting against the foreign—and infidel—occupation of their country.

If the Iraqi National Congress had been installed as the interim government of Iraq after the fall of Saddam it would have moved promptly to include individuals who had stayed in Iraq, and to start a process of democratic governance based on free elections and some form of federalism, with ordinary life governed as much as possible by communities below the level of the national government. This was the basis of the agreement around which the Iraqi National Congress united and it was the strong belief of Chalabi. And of course it would have been part of the interim government's mandate from the forces that had brought it to power and were providing necessary assistance against its foreign (and Baathist) enemies.

No one can know whether such an Iraqi government could have succeeded. It seems clear that initially it would have been accepted by almost all Iraqis as their interim government, but whether this initial acceptance would have lasted 6 weeks, or 6 months or 6 years probably depends on how well they would have governed. And even if the US accepted that government as Iraq's sovereign its relationship with the US and the Coalition would have been difficult. The Coalition would have had a major security role, great financial resources, and great technical expertise. It would be very easy for a new weak government to be warped by dependency, and very hard for the United States not to treat that government with disdain and contempt, confident that it knew better than any bunch of provincial Arabs with no experience of free government.

Of course if the United States had used the Iraqi National Congress to create an Iraqi interim government this would not have meant "turning Iraq completely over to the Iraqis," who were clearly not ready to assume full and exclusive control of their country after Saddam's destruction. The U.S. as liberator, security provider, ally, and financial benefactor, would have had to be given substantial voice in Iraqi decisions by the Iraqis. The relationship would have inevitably been difficult and full of conflict and misunderstanding.

There would have been three main advantages to having an Iraqi government from the beginning and thus avoiding formal occupation. First, there would have been much less

Iraqi resistance to the foreign "occupation force." Second the Iraqis understood Iraq much better than the Coalition forces and would have avoided many mistakes and would have done many things more effectively than the Coalition—for example finding Saddam, which took the CPA nearly nine months. Of course there are other things that the Coalition probably understood better than the Iraqis. Third, the relationship between the Iraqi government and the Coalition would have been healthier if the Iraqis were sovereign from the beginning. To Paul Bremer (and to a lesser extent Secretary Don Rumsfeld) it seemed easier to be a ruling occupier with power to do what he knew to be best, but everyone would have been better off if they had had to accept the difficulties involved in having to treat the Iraqi government as sovereigns of their own country rather than subjects of the occupation authority.

One of the main theories cited by the United States for not letting the Iraqi National Congress come in with a military force and become the interim government was that the Iraqi National Congress was composed of "externals" who supposedly didn't represent the Iraqis who had stayed there under Saddam. And of course the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) found Iraqis who told them that they did not want to be governed by externals.

Undoubtedly some of the CPA and State Department policy-makers believed this theory, but it was a convenient and disastrous excuse for continuing the "anybody but Chalabi" policy of State and CIA, and it turned out to be wrong even in its own terms. First of all the CPA proposed to make Adnan Pachachi President, even though he was not only an external, but had even held himself aloof from the political process among the exiles, was too old to be a democratic leader, had too much Baathist and Saudi background, and was a Sunni. Secondly, the CPA never found a lot of "internal" political leaders. And in fact the elected government today is dominated by the leaders and groups that composed the Iraqi National Congress. Hindsight confirms that the Iraqi National Congress was a substantially representative and acceptable group to use as an interim government, and that the Iraqis don't reject "externals."

The theory on which the United States claimed to be basing its effort to create an Iraqi government was simplistic. This theory was that there could not be a legitimate Iraqi government until there were elections. This is, to be blunt, silly. Democracy does not require that after more than a generation of dictatorship a country has to be able to have a free election in only a year or two. A real democratic election process—including constitution writing—requires years, probably closer to five than to one. The U.S. required 10 years from independence to the installation of President Washington and the first Congress. The governments under the Articles of Confederation were not able to effectively rule the country—which is why they were replaced. And it isn't clear that the early Republic could have held together without the immense political power that George Washington held personally because of his character and because he had been the leader of the Revolutionary Army. He was elected because he had power, more than he had power because he was elected.

It would not have been “undemocratic” for the United States to have installed the Iraqi National Congress as an interim government, allowing Iraqis to design and implement the transition from a group of exile leaders who were able to govern because they had the prestige of being part of the liberating force and of being installed by the Coalition that had removed Saddam (before opinion turned against it when it became an occupier). If Iraq had been in the hands of an Iraqi interim government instead of an occupation force there would have been more time for developing the political processes of democracy leading to fully elected governments. And an Iraqi government might have been able to get more support in Europe than a "Bush government." It must be remembered that the leader of the Iraqi National Congress, Ahmad Chalabi, had demonstrated his deep commitment to democratic ways from the time he started the INC. He was much more able to understand how to move Iraq to real and effective democracy—and more committed to that goal—than Paul Bremer, Colin Powell, and all the other foreigners influencing Coalition policy.

Another element in actual policy-making or implementation on the ground in Baghdad is that, while Bremer etc. were saying that the Iraqi National Congress had insufficient democratic credentials to be allowed to govern, much of the CIA and others in the CPA were doing what they could to advance the possibility that Iraq could be taken over by a new strong-man (military dictator) acceptable to the Sunni minority—and the nearby Sunni dictatorships supposedly allied to the US.

Another disastrous decision by the United States occupation authority was to use a system of proportional representation for the elections. Under this system voters get to choose only a Party, not an individual. In normal situations this is not a very good system, although it has its advantages. But in a country with major ethnic tensions, elections by party instead of by individual is a disaster. The inevitable result, seen in Iraq, is that parties are organized on ethnic/sectarian lines and ethnic loyalty determines most votes. Voting by districts, with individual local candidates, even though they would be on party lists, makes room for a much more complicated politics. And it is the cross-cutting complexities of political life that makes it possible for democracy to work.

Iraqi Reaction to the U.S. “Invasion”

One of the charges made by critics of the administration—and particularly against the so-called neo-con “architects” of the policy—is that they told the United States army that when it entered Iraq it “would be greeted by flowers.” This supposedly was disproved by events and showed that the “neo-cons” did not understand Iraq. The “greeting with flowers” prediction was a hyperbolic answer to the practical military question whether in planning the attack the army needed to be prepared to face a civilian population that was ambushing or sabotaging its supply lines. Also, how intensely would the Iraqi army fight back. Those who had been advocating the attack used the hyperbole of flowers to assert forcefully that the Iraqi army would not fight very hard and that there was no need to worry about the population being so hostile that the army would need to allocate much force to secure its supply lines. Both these assertions proved correct, although the Iraqi

army did fight somewhat harder than expected because Saddam had put political officers with all the regular army units to compel them to continue fighting. This unexpected tactic had some effect but didn't make much difference; the Iraqi army was defeated within three weeks.

It is quite clear that most of the Iraqi population initially welcomed the U.S. and coalition forces—when they came as liberators. From the beginning the Baathist bitter-enders, with Saddam still alive, attacked U.S. forces and the government, as well as looting and destroying. The extent of Saddam's preparations for actions after his army was defeated was not predicted. Outside jihadists also quickly began to enter Iraq to fight the United States. But sizeable numbers of Iraqis acting on their own behalf only began to attack U.S. forces months later, after the liberation was converted into an occupation.

We will never know whether the Iraqis (other than Baathists and jihadists) would have come to regard the United States as an occupying force even if the U.S. had stayed liberators by turning the country over to an interim Iraqi government. Perhaps they would. Certainly some would have done so. But the extent of the attack on the CPA after it declared itself to be an occupier does not contradict the prediction that generally the Iraqi people would welcome U.S. liberation forces.

Sunni-Shia Conflict

Many Middle Eastern sophisticates believed from before 2003 until today that the U.S. effort to create an independent Iraq without a military dictator had to fail because of the conflict in Iraq between the Sunni and Shia branches of Islam. (Iraq is divided roughly between 60% Arab Shia, 20% Arab Sunni, and 20% Kurdish Sunni—many of the latter belonging to the Sufi branch of Islam.) And it is still possible that Iraq will founder on this division.

Before looking at what has actually happened we should mention some facts about Iraq that suggest that Sunni-Shia conflict might not make Iraq impossible to govern consensually. First, while Islam is a fundamental part of the identity of almost all Iraqis, most Iraqis have been too weakly religious to be dominated by theological differences. Second Sunnis and Shia have been together in many aspects of Iraqi life. For example, a number of the major Iraqi tribes include both Sunni and Shia. The modern part of Baghdad society has also involved both Sunni and Shia. There has also been a good deal of intermarriage. And many Iraqis grew up or lived in mixed Sunni-Shia towns or neighborhoods.

It is only distance or ignorance that makes outsiders see Iraq solely in terms of the divisions between Sunni and Shia and Kurds. That division is not the only thing that concerns Iraqis. Iraqis concern about their country usually is just as, or more, focused on those divisions where Sunnis and Shias are found on both sides. That is, for example, both Sunnis and Shia join in being upper class, and both Sunnis and Shia are part of the lower class. The tribal differences are important for many. And also the division between

strongly tribal Iraqis and more modern Iraqis, who are at various stages of the process of breaking out of the tribal framework, is often very important. Iraq has for a long time had a large educated middle class. There are also of course normal political divisions as in most modern or modernizing societies. Outsiders who don't know Iraq think that politics is all about the Sunni, Shia, Kurd division, but for Iraqis other divisions and conflict are normally more salient.

Outside Iraq it is often assumed the Saddam's oppression of Shia had led to strong anti-Sunni feelings among the Shia majority, but this expectation doesn't take into account that Saddam also oppressed and tortured many Sunnis. His regime was seen more as personal, family, sub-tribe, and Tikriti oppression than as Sunni oppression. Most of the enlisted soldiers in Saddam's army, who fought loyally for Iraq in its war with Shia Iran, were Shia Iraqi Arabs. Although it is true that almost all of the army officers and key people in Saddam's regime were Sunni, there was at least one Shiite in Saddam's inner circle, and others at slightly lower levels.

An important fourth factor working against a fatal Sunni-Shia division is the character and beliefs of Grand Ayatollah Sistani, who is by far the most important leader of Iraqi Shiites. From the beginning he has stood for a united Iraq and against revenge or persecution of Sunnis, and against a theological regime for Iraq. He regards the Shia rule in Iran not as a model but as a warning example for Iraq to stay away from—as well as a deviation from traditional Shia religious teaching. He believes and teaches that there is ample room in an Arab Shia-led Iraq for Sunnis and for Sufi and other Kurds—as well as other minorities. He said all these things before 2003 and his conduct since then demonstrates that he means them.

In brief, while before 2003 there was basis for concern about potential destructive effects of the Sunni-Shia differences in Iraq, there were also major features of Iraqi life that could lead one to believe that Iraq would not necessarily be doomed by this conflict. So let's look at what happened in fact after the removal of Saddam.

A major strategy of those who were enemies of the Iraqi government, because of its American roots and support, was to produce a civil war between Sunnis and Shia so that Iraq would be ungovernable. A major tactic in support of this strategy was for Sunnis to murder large numbers of Shia civilians and to destroy Shia holy places. It was hoped that these mass slaughters of Shiites would lead Shiites to respond by slaughtering Sunnis, thus stimulating other Sunnis to kill still more Shiites in an escalating cycle of murder and revenge leading to a full civil war. Thousands of innocent Shiites were randomly slaughtered in the attempt to implement this strategy. And these slaughters produced some tactical success in that formal and informal Shia militias were formed to fight back and to take revenge by slaughtering innocent Sunnis. Thousands of Iraqis were killed in this effort to create a civil war, and many areas where Sunnis and Shia had formerly lived together were cleaned of one group or the other, with barriers springing up all over to keep Sunnis and Shia separated.

Another lesser outside force stimulating Sunni-Shia suspicion and division was actions by the United States government, especially the CIA, that did many things to strengthen Sunnis in the completely vain hope that they could again gain control of Iraq and restore "stability" to the region. The more mainstream part of the U.S. administration in Iraq — while they didn't try to bring the Sunnis to power—believed at various times that the main political problem in creating a united Iraq was Sunni disaffection and antagonism resulting from their loss of control of Iraq. This U.S. theory led to numerous United States actions designed to compensate or help or reassure the Sunnis. These actions of course caused suspicion among Shiites and increased the danger of civil war. Especially since the U.S. branded a major popular Shiite movement, led by Muqtada Sadr, as irreconciliable while negotiating with, and paying off, Sunni opposition forces.

And especially in 2006 there nearly was a civil war. There was fighting and reciprocal slaughters and territorial separation. But there never was a full civil war because never were there two Iraqi governments or political organizations fighting against each other. And the incipient civil war was ended before it hardened and destroyed Iraq.

The principal factor limiting and then ending the civil war was the role of Grand Ayatollah Sistani whose influence first delayed and then limited Shiite revenge against Sunni attacks. Sistani continually stood for the goal of a united Iraq including both Sunni and Shia living in peace and respect.

Another force that eventually stopped the incipient civil war was widespread Sunni revulsion against outside jihadists and extremist Sunni religious fighters who were killing large numbers of Iraqis—not just Americans or Shiites but also Sunnis—and imposing restrictive Wahhabi Islam by force on Iraqis. Also, as the Sunnis turned against the foreign jihadists and their allies, the Americans and the Iraqi government became more able to, and did, suppress the Shia militias that had been taking indiscriminate revenge on Sunnis.

And the Shia majority, which had had to accept Shia militias fighting on their behalf against Sunni attacks, was able to support peace and order and the government once the Sunni-jihadist offensive against the Shia population was defeated.

So the Sunni-Shia civil war was prevented—or ended, depending on one's precise definition of civil war. What has it left behind? Does the current state of Sunni-Shia relations in Iraq doom the current government once the United States army leaves Iraq?

One thing is clear. The near civil war in 2006 didn't erupt because of uncontrollable hatred between Sunni and Shia; it began as a result of a major effort by substantial forces of outsiders to produce a civil war, including hundreds of murders. This does not mean that there was no preexisting conflict. It does mean that what happened is not evidence that such a war was inevitable or that it is inevitable in the future.

But how does the major flare-up of antagonism and hatred that peaked in 2006 affect the danger today? One possibility is that it shows that the danger is not so great; if Iraq could

pull back from the brink after so many murders, that conflict is now not a great danger unless new foreign attacks try to reignite the conflict. On the other hand there is no question that Sunni-Shiite sensitivities, fears, and antagonism were heightened by the period of violence. A very large number of Iraqis recently lost friends and family to murder by the other group. So both the incentive for new fighting, and the awareness of the need to prevent new fighting, have been intensified.

In brief we can conclude that those who say that Sunni-Shiite conflict will inevitable destroy the peace of Iraq when foreign forces are gone are overreaching. On the other hand there is no denying the danger. Sistani's departure would be more dangerous than that of the US army.

How Has the Iraq War Affected the International Struggle Against Jihadist Terrorism?

It is widely believed that the United States Iraqi initiative set back the US and Western struggle to prevent a much bigger jihad and to defeat the jihadists.[1] The war was described as a recruiting tool for Muslim terrorists who flocked to Iraq because the U.S. had attacked a Muslim state. The implication being that many or most of these "terrorists" who came to Iraq to become suicide bombers against U.S. forces would not have been terrorists without the provocation or stimulation of the need to resist American aggression in Iraq.

On the other hand, if those who came to Iraq to fight the United States, hundreds of whom were killed or captured by U.S. forces, were jihadists already committed to fighting against the American great Satan, then providing a military battleground where they could be fought by American troops was a very effective way to reduce the number of jihadists interested in killing Americans, and perhaps to discourage others from becoming jihadists. The dismal experience of jihadist fighters in Iraq certainly could lead Muslims to doubt that Allah was supporting this attempt to make a jihad, or to establish a new Islamic caliphate.

There is no doubt that the public and diplomatic bad reputation of President Bush and especially of his Iraq effort weakened the United States and reduced its ability to gain support for other programs against jihadist terrorism. Muslim countries that would have had to be cautious if the diplomatic environment had been different could safely do things

[1] Some people argue that there is no jihadist threat. They say there are only individual and small groups of terrorists who attack the US because of our overbearing–arrogant–policies in the Middle East and our support for Israel. We should protect ourselves against such small scale threats by enhanced police measures and that we should not think of ourselves as in a war with anyone. Terrorism resulting from personal frustration or from reaction against US Middle Eastern policies is not a jihad. Jihad is a violent challenge based on Islamic ideas and goals, responding to US character not to US foreign policy. The principal reason for believing that we are facing at least an attempted jihad comes from listening to what the "jihadist terrorists" are saying when they speak to us, when they speak to each other, and when they speak to other Muslims to get their support.

they would not have dared to do if the U.S. position had not been so weak. But this weakness is temporary and some of the beneficial effects of Iraq may be longer lasting.

Jihadists can say what they like, but they have had to face the fact that within 20 months after 9/11 the governments of Afghanistan and Iraq had fallen and the United States had moved hundreds of thousands of troops into the Middle East. These actions led Libya to give up its program to acquire nuclear weapons and to step back from terrorist connections.

In sum, while the strong United States' actions in response to 9/11 and to Bush's recognition of the attempted jihad against the U.S. and the West led Muslim leaders to appreciate their potential danger from the U.S. if they support terrorism, the political reaction against the U.S. in the U.S. and Western Europe, reduced that danger to them and allowed them to hope that the U.S. would be prevented from acting against them.

Al Qaeda, which is a central element in the effort to create jihad, was very clear about the strategic importance of Iraq to their program. They said it was essential to them to defeat the United States in Iraq—not because they cared so much about Iraq itself, but because a U.S. victory against Saddam would be a decisive obstacle to their plans. Their actions were evidence that they believed what they said. They threw everything they could into the effort to turn the invasion of Iraq into a defeat for the U.S.

What were the jihadists trying to achieve by putting so much resources and so much effort into Iraq? They understood that Saddam had been overthrown and could not be restored. So what was their goal? They said that they were trying to create a new caliphate in Iraq as the basis for spreading Muslim rule through the world. And indeed they named a Caliph, although he never achieved any acceptance among Muslims. But it seems likely that their more achievable objective was to turn Iraq into a defeat and embarrassment for the United States, which would encourage Muslims to believe that jihad was the winning side and that the U.S. would be deterred from acting against it by its defeat in Iraq.

As discussed above, the key issue determining the future of jihad is how many and which Muslims believe that jihad is succeeding and gaining momentum, and how many see the West led by the United States as strong and determined enough to make jihad hopeless and dangerous. An easy U.S. victory against Saddam would have made jihad look very dangerous, and on the other hand, a defeat for the U.S. in Iraq at the hands of the jihadists, even with Saddam removed, would have made jihad seem much more viable. The jihadists achieved a partial or temporary success by making it seem, for some years at least, as if the invasion of Iraq was a failure, and also by gaining widespread condemnation of Saddam's removal by the United States—which reduced the chance that the U.S. could go on to act against other Arab governments.

While for years now the invasion of Iraq has been widely regarded as a huge and costly mistake, immensely damaging the reputation of the Bush administration, the jihadist effort that helped achieve these benefits was very costly to them. They lost not only many

hundreds of foot soldiers but also several key leaders who had built up significant reputation before being killed or captured. The bloodiness and extremism of their campaign in Iraq against Iraqis turned many Iraqis strongly against jihad and against Al Qaeda, something presumably noticed by many Muslims around the world. And they failed to force the United States to flee in failure and disgrace—although at the key point much of the Democratic Party in the U.S. advocated that the U.S. do so. And it now looks as if the ultimate jihadist failure in Iraq will be that Iraq has become and may well continue to be a major Arab government strongly committed as an open enemy of jihad.

One can argue that going into Iraq was not an effective way to fight against jihadists, but the jihadists disagreed. They felt that they would be badly damaged if the U.S. invasion was a success and they worked very hard to turn it into a defeat. They failed. If their analysis of their own interests was correct, Iraq has turned out to be a major advance in the struggle against jihad. Very few think of Iraq as a great success for the U.S., but there is no reason to doubt that those who matter in the Muslim world clearly understand that Iraq was a big defeat for the jihadists who put so much of their strength into a vain effort to defeat and embarrass United States forces. (Which is not to say that their defeat in Iraq was so great that they can't recover; there are many battles yet to fight.)

What Have We Got Now in Iraq?

It would be silly to say that Iraq now has a working democracy—for two reasons. First, the current degree of success is fragile. Second, it is a grossly defective democracy. On the other hand what there is now in Iraq is an immense accomplishment by the Iraqis, produced under the most adverse circumstances, and it is something that most opponents of the United States policy and most experts in the Middle East thought could not be anywhere near to being possible.

Iraq has a government for a united, federal Iraq which is so accepted as the legitimate government of the country that there is no major group or political movement that is trying to replace it (except by political means). In other words it is a consensual government, not a dictatorship. It is also the only Arab country with freedom of the press and freedom to organize opposition parties. The political situation is good enough so that if it doesn't get dramatically worse there will be no doubt that it will be an amazing advance toward democracy in the heart of the Arab world. And there can be little doubt that Iraqi freedom and the Iraqi example will have a major influence on the rest of the Arab world. It will indeed be a destabilizing influence on authoritarian Arab regimes.

Many opponents of the United States intervention in Iraq are scornful of the Iraqi government. They point to its serious defects as demonstration that the effort to build democracy in Iraq—and probably any Arab country—was foolishly naïve or excessively "ideological." But that is partisan foolishness. No one would argue that Iraq, after generations of brutal totalitarian rule and five years of war primarily between foreign forces, could in five years produce a strong liberal democracy. Such a perfectionist standard has nothing to do with reality and contributes nothing to the policy discussion.

But we have to ask whether the prospective destabilization of the region by the Iraqi example, if the Iraqi government continues as it is, will be a good thing or a bad thing—a success or a failure for United States policy? In the short term it is impossible to predict. The early beneficiaries of the democratic influence radiating from Iraq may well turn out to be Islamists and jihadists, at least in one or more countries. We need to remember the sobering lesson of Iran, where the removal of the Shah was initially seen as a victory for democracy and human rights but quickly turned Iran into a worse tyranny than it had been and the cause of much of the world's current troubles. While Khomeini was an Islamic revolutionary who extensively published his ideas before he came to power and we should not have been surprised by the results, there are a great variety of paths by which the failure of moves toward democracy can make things temporarily worse. Such a bad result is not the only possibility, but it is a real possibility.

Perhaps such dangerous steps toward democracy are what we have to take. It seems quite possible that, in the end, movement toward democracy may be the only way to permanently defeat the forces of jihad. And it is unlikely that there is any path to democracy that is not a path on which there is great conflict and many steps backward along the way.

The cynics say that no good deed goes unpunished. We can certainly feel that in enabling Iraq to become a free country on the uncertain path toward democracy we have done a good deed; now we shall see how we may be punished.

Another reason for thinking that the war is a failure is the belief that Shiite rule in Iraq is bad for the United States either because Shiites are inevitably "more radical" or because a Shiite-led Iraq will be controlled by Iran. These fears of Shiism were one of the major reasons why State Department and other experts believed from the beginning that the war was naïve and foolish. Like the fear of inevitable Shiite-Sunni civil war, these fears were not completely without basis. There was a real danger of Iranian domination of Iraqi Shiism, but so far the outcome seems to be more nearly the reverse, that is, Iraqi influence may ultimately weaken Shiite unity in Iran—especially after the divisions produced by the Iranian reaction to the fraudulent Presidential election in June 2009.

All or almost all of the Shiite leaders of Iraq—and the Kurdish leaders—have strong connections with Iran. And they recognize the power—physical as well as financial and political—of Iranian agents in Iraq. If there were an immediate danger of Sunni control of Iraq they would go to Iran for help (but this possibility is no longer prominent). And if it looked as if Iran was becoming the dominant power in the region many of them would try to get on the winning side—some more quickly than others. But generally they have shown that they have decided to stand with their own country against Iranian efforts to influence them. They have not been tools of Iran as the State Department and others feared. And Iran which may have had high hopes of gaining control of Iraq after the U.S. departure has had to sharply reduce its ambitions concerning Iraq, partly because of its inability to control the actions of Iraqis who had been thought to be their agents.

The provincial elections in January 2009 demonstrated two things. One, the weakness of those seen as too tied to Iran. The other, the strength of Iraqi nationalism. Amir Taheri pointed out that every party with "Arab" or "Islam" in its name lost votes, and every party with "Iraq" in its name gained votes.

Another long-standing fear about Shiite rule in Iraq is that it would make Iraq into the kind of religious tyranny that Iran has become. But the strong evidence to date is that Ayatollah Sistani, the dominant figure in Iraqi Shiism, has no intention or desire to use Shiite rule to impose a religious regime on Iraq. He has seen that in Iran such religious rule has turned large parts of the population against Islam, while misgoverning the country, and he wants no part of such a role for religion in the government of Iraq. He does not want Iraq to be run by ayatollahs. And Iraqis have come to understand that the current government, although controlled by Shiite parties, will not try to impose Shiism or strict Muslim rules on the general Iraqi population.

Why is the Iraqi Government Still Fragile?

The primary reason that the effort to create a consensual Iraqi government may yet fail, despite the success so far, is that democracy is hard for anyone to achieve. Commitment to compromise, to the rule of law, to tolerance of political enemies, to rejecting the temptation to solve internal conflict by using force, are difficult lessons to learn. Most Iraqi experience has been with different ways of governing, and the Arab world provides little reinforcement for the ways of democracy. And hard as the path to democracy is in any circumstances, in Iraq it has been made much harder by foreign interference—including our own. While the United States has been trying—in some sense—to help the Iraqi government to achieve independence and democracy, it is impossible for the kind of relationship that there had to be between the U.S. and Iraq not to make Iraq's task harder. The hardest lesson that must be learned in order to make democracy work is the need to take responsibility for mistakes and go on to fix problems. When a government starts off supported by a powerful ally providing money and force—and necessarily claiming a right to influence on decisions—it is too easy to yield to the temptation of making the easier political choice and blame mistakes on "big brother." How does one learn to take responsibility when mistakes can be blamed on the ally?

While the foreign jihadists and the Baathist bitter-enders have been so substantially defeated that Iraqi forces are now large and strong enough to control them without the help of Unite States forces, these armed enemies still exist and probably are capable of causing great trouble and growing again if the Iraqi government does not have the political unity and competence to maintain the integrity and vigor of its security forces. (And the strength of the Iraqi security forces probably still depends on technical and logistic support, and further training assistance by U.S. forces.)

The Iranian threat also is still alive—although greatly reduced by the election fiasco. So far Iraq has shown that it can stand against large scale Iranian subversion—both political and violent. But Iran might increase its efforts. More important, if the Iranian

revolutionary regime survives its current troubles and gets nuclear weapons, and/or the U.S. leads Iraqis to believe that it will allow Iranian efforts to dominate the region to go unchallenged, many Iraqi political leaders may change their calculations about whether they can afford to resist Iranian claims on their loyalty. If the Iraqi government falters badly, and Iran makes a new subversive offensive at a time when its regional power seems to be growing, Iraq's stability could be endangered.

Finally, it is difficult to know the extent to which necessary Iraqi self-confidence and mutual trust depends on the presence and expected commitment of United States support and influence. Iraqis see that things are working now, but they know that the U.S. is playing a large role in Iraq, and however critical they are of the U.S., they can't help being somewhat afraid that if the United States removes itself Iraq wouldn't work as well. They can have this fear even if they also think that they can do much better without the U.S. One way or another the necessary process of separation from the current U.S. involvement in Iraqi affairs will be a strain and a challenge for the Iraqis. And some people, probably including some Iraqis, believe that it is only the presence of United States forces that keep Sunni and Shia from fighting against each other—a prediction that cannot be fully tested before the U.S. departure, although that departure is already influencing Iraqi political life.

Whatever happens Iraqi politicians from all factions will find Iraqi politics frustrating. The country is in need and in danger and most leaders will find actions of other Iraqi politicians to be foolish, selfish, and dangerous. How can they be allowed to do such things? The two greatest dangers to Iraqi self-government are first the internal stalemates where inexperienced democracy frustrates necessary action, and, second efforts created by that frustration to put aside democracy to overcome the stalemates. Sometimes non-democratic action is necessary for democracy to survive, but too much willingness to push democracy aside can kill it—at least until the next try.

How Do the Iraqis Feel about the U.S. and Americans Now?

Muslims, perhaps even more than others, hate foreign intervention or foreign occupiers. There have been hundreds of incidents where United States troops or contract personnel have uselessly or unnecessarily abused and even killed innocent Iraqi civilians. There can be no doubt that many Iraqis have personal reasons to hate the U.S. forces. Also, because of their background and culture it is very hard for Iraqis to imagine or to believe that U.S. forces came to Iraq to help Iraq, and that they are not there to take something from Iraq, or to control Iraq, and that the U.S. cares at all about the wellbeing of Iraqis.

On the other hand many Iraqis have had close contact with United States forces and in most cases they have seen those forces fighting bravely and powerfully and trying to protect Iraqi civilians from people who were trying to kill them. Mostly they have seen those forces being kindly and generous, especially to Iraqi children. They have seen those forces working to help rebuild Iraq and trying to solve practical local Iraqi problems, cooperating with local Iraqis in a respectful manner. The idea has become widespread—

although certainly not universal—that American troops, especially the fighting forces, are not like Arabs; they are brave and they are generally benevolent.

Furthermore Iraqis have seen the foreign jihadists and wahhabis killing and oppressing Iraqis—not exceptionally, by individuals, but systematically as an intentional matter of policy. So in the war between jihadists and Baathists on one side, and the United States forces on the other, the great majority of Iraqis, including Sunnis, have come to see the U.S. as fighting in their interest. And they also remember how cruel Saddam was and they are glad to see him gone, for which the U.S. has to be given primary credit.

There are few Iraqis who are satisfied with the performance of the current Iraqi government. They know about its corruption and incompetence. Nevertheless most Iraqis feel that the regime is an attempt to do what is the right thing for Iraq to do—although they are not sure exactly how to do it or that it can work. They want to try to keep Iraq united (but federal). They like freedom. They do not want to go back to another dictatorship. The enthusiasm of their voting shows that they like to be able to elect their leaders. They like the idea that Iraq will be the first Arab country to have a government like that of France and England and Germany and the United States and all the other successful and modern countries. That is, they like showing that they can do something that other, lesser, Arab countries have not been able to do. While they feel that other Arabs are their brothers they have various degrees of contempt for the governments of the other Arab countries, and are not distressed to be doing something that other Arabs aren't doing and say that Arabs shouldn't do. Iraqis see themselves as Arab leaders not followers.

Most Iraqis have come gradually to see the United States as having come to their country to remove Saddam and to help them to establish a new kind of Arab government that they believe is the best hope for Iraq's future. And many of them see the U.S. as an ally against Iran and against the forces of jihad and coercive Islamic fundamentalism. Therefore, although they have negative feelings about many things the U.S. does, generally the leadership of Iraq and probably a majority of its population see the U.S. as basically on their side—which enables them also to be grateful to the U.S. for having removed Saddam and for giving them a chance to build Iraq. But at the same time they are also angry at the U.S. for failing to restore electricity, water supply, etc. Iraqis, like most people, have no trouble having contradictory ideas at the same time.

These limited, but important favorable feelings about the United States are probably quite vulnerable, and could easily change if things go badly in the future. But they are a fair characterization of current Iraqi opinion, as well as that opinion can be determined and described in such a relatively simple and summary way.

Misunderstanding the Conflict in Iraq

One reason why the war has been so misreported and misunderstood—why it was judged by so many to be hopeless—is that most discussion of it has been based on a largely

incorrect picture of the situation in Iraq. The fighting in Iraq has been viewed through the prism of Vietnam and many other guerrilla wars in the third world. The United States was assumed to be fighting against a popular movement for national self-determination—which many people assume to be a hopeless as well as an immoral effort.

But this picture has never been a correct understanding of what was happening in Iraq. At no point since 2003 has there been an Iraqi movement with widespread support trying to replace the Iraqi government. The main political leadership of those attacking the Iraqi government have been jihadists and Baathists, both small minorities with foreign support and often direction. There are partial exceptions. The Sunni attacks had some mass public support for a while primarily among tribal Sunnis. But it was never a movement supported by a majority of all classes and groups of Sunnis.

The Sunnis inherently had three choices: become part of the regime, fundamentally change the constitutional system, or secede. Most urban and modern Sunnis understood that although they are the traditional rulers of Iraq they could not have the political power to change the system; they didn't want to secede; so they understood that they would have to pursue their interests as part of the regime. Therefore the Sunni fighters were never related to a Sunni political party or a Sunni proto-government that could pose a serious *political* challenge. Many Sunnis recognized from the beginning what most Sunnis have come to recognize reluctantly, that in the long run their best interest is for Iraq to become a modern country whose rule is based on consensual politics and the rule of the majority. Therefore they have to try to get what they want by participating in the Iraqi political process, not to try to bring down the government in which they are invited to participate. For a while many Sunnis refused to recognize the realities, or maintained the hope that the Shia were such a weak and inferior people that they could be bullied into submission. But this hope was doomed from the start if the Sunni use of force was defeated. And when the Shiites came out ahead in the Sunni-Shiite fighting in Baghdad the Sunnis came to understand that they could not brush aside or avoid Shiite power.

Of course attacks against the United States—to the extent that they could be distinguished from attacks against the government—had substantial public support for some years. These attacks were based on anti-foreign feelings—and to some extent on bad experiences with U.S. forces—but they never reflected a political movement vying for power. The U.S. had already accepted the creation of an Iraqi government; so what were they fighting *for*? And they never reflected a unified Iraqi emotion; there were at all points large numbers of Iraqis who continued to be grateful to the U.S. for removing Saddam and who understood the U.S. to be supporting the creation of an independent free government of Iraq.

This absence of a popular and political movement attempting to become the government of Iraq is the reason some analysts were reluctant to speak of an Iraqi "insurgency." Those who thought that "insurgency" was a misleading term recognized that there were a collection of attackers who were a serious military problem; but they believed that these attackers did not have the political character of an insurgency—which has the connotation of a serious political movement with popular support for replacing the

government. It was an argument about the definition of "insurgency" and about the political reality in Iraq, addressing those in the west who had learned the lesson that it is nearly hopeless to try to defeat a popular insurgency with outside support in a third world country. The answer of these analysts to this common perception was that, even if you believed that the United States couldn't defeat an Iraqi insurgency, the U.S. could win in Iraq because the fighting there wasn't a "real insurgency."

And the "non-insurgency analysts" have been proven to be correct about that distinction; the reason why the political and security situation has changed so quickly and so completely is that there never was a genuine full-fledged insurgency. The fight was mostly with unpopular minorities. The Sunni attackers and the anti-U.S. fighters never had a political cause with any staying power against the Iraqi government. So when things finally shook down, and Iraqis recognized on whose side everybody was fighting, the Iraqi government finally represented an essentially unified Iraqi population against its foreign-organized and led attackers. Iraqis believed that the United States accepted Iraqi sovereignty and was intending, when the outside enemies were defeated, to leave unless freely invited to stay as an ally. A real insurgency would not have disappeared so quickly and completely. (Nor would a real civil war have ended so abruptly.)

The difference between what might be called a "genuine insurgency" and other kinds of violent challenges to government is often critical. It is a subtle and complicated distinction deserving more analysis. We may often have to face what could be called "simulated insurgency" in which a government is attacked by some combination of small minority fanatics, outside aggressors, and local forces of violence using essentially organized crime techniques for dominating populations, perhaps with a thin cover of ideology or political slogans. Such attacks present a military/police problem and can be defeated by competent use of force—unless those attacking the government have too much outside assistance to overcome. It is important to recognize such attacks and to defend against them because they can be used against many governments. Genuine insurgencies present much more difficult choices, and are usually much harder to defeat. Unfortunately the distinction is not always clear and there are many grey areas; but it is important to recognize that in principle such a distinction exists—whether or not one wants to use the word "insurgency" to distinguish between the popular movement that can rarely be defeated and the various attacks that a legitimate and accepted government sometimes must be prepared to defeat by military/police measures.

If people had been willing to see that once the United States ended the occupation and accepted the Iraqi government most Iraqis were on the same side, and there was no challenge by an Iraqi alternative government, they would not have been so sure that the war would be lost.

Why Is the Iraqi Intervention So Widely Seen as a Failure?

One reason, of course, is the high cost—tens of thousands of Iraqi fatalities, thousands of American deaths, hundreds of billions of dollars, and the embarrassment of Abu Ghraib and the other inevitable crimes that go along with war.

Another reason is the foolish mistakes of U.S. policy. Corruption and stupidity and self-interestedness have been rife and widely reported. (Although there is more that has not yet received a lot of attention and some of the alleged mistakes were not mistakes.)

And the war is still tarred by the fact that one of the main justifications given for starting it, Iraqi nuclear weapons, turns out to have been largely incorrect.

Furthermore there are the arguments discussed above—which cannot be measured or tested—that there were better ways to fight against the danger of jihadist terrorism and that anti-U.S. feelings generated by the war, as well as its draining of U.S. resources, set back the struggle with jihadists.

Nevertheless it is somewhat strange that a war that accomplished so much for the defense of the West is so widely assumed to be a complete failure and a disastrous mistake.

A large part of the political cost of the war in Iraq, and the main reason why the war has weakened the United States politically, has been the widespread acceptance of the idea that the war was a mistake and would be a failure for the U.S. But were these ideas self-evident or inevitable? Or were they in large part the result (not cause) of antagonism to President Bush and to the U.S.—an antagonism indulged even against the national interests of those who expressed it? Consider the following.

It has been apparent for some years that the war in Iraq has not been a war between two or more Iraqi movements competing for power. Anyone who looked at what was happening in Iraq could see clearly there was not a civil war concerning which the world's democracies could or should be neutral. For years now it has been clear that the war in Iraq was between the constitutional, elected government of Iraq which was accepted by the great majority of Iraqi citizens and on the other side several groups with very little public support trying to destroy that government. The main groups trying to destroy the government of Iraq were jihadists, led and supported either by Iran or by Al Qaeda, or Baathists supported by the remnants of Saddam's regime in Syria and Jordan. These were the main opponents in the war, although at times there was a substantial Sunni movement and others with anti-occupation sentiments also attacking U.S. forces and to some extent the Iraqi government. And there were attacks by Sadr forces and some others.

The question is why the leading Western democracies should not support an elected constitutional government with freedom of the press and freedom to organize when it is under attack by jihadists and other unsavory characters. Has it not been clear for years that the survival and success of the Iraqi government against their jihadist attackers is

strongly in the interests of Western democracies? If the Western democracies—and the Democratic Party in the United States—had given political support and strong endorsement to the government of Iraq, even without providing additional money or troops, that government's danger would have been reduced. An important part of the weakness of the Iraqi government's position has been that it has had so little political support apart from the U.S. and a few lesser powers.

It seems as if the reason why the democracies—and the Democratic Party—haven't been supporting the government of Iraq, even though doing so would have been in their strong national interest, is that they couldn't have supported the Iraqi government without providing some degree of vindication to President George Bush. It was more important to them to express their anti-Bush (and often anti-American) feelings, and to stay with their anti-Bush ideas, than to try to protect their national interests.

In brief, a major reason why the Iraqi government has looked so much like a loser is that many governments have let their anti-Bush feelings overcome their common sense and their real interests. Of course the Iraqi government has been very corrupt and inept, but that is not the main reason why it has had so little foreign support. If Western European governments and the Democratic Party had given political and psychological support to the government of Iraq, after Iraqis ratified the constitution and the government was elected in 2005, Iraq would not have seemed to be such a disaster for the last four years. This in turn, would have given confidence to the Iraqi government and given its enemies less reason to think they could win if they continued to keep fighting. But politicians wouldn't say that the Iraqi government was making a brave attempt to create a democracy and its attackers were enemies of the West, because if they had said that, and begun rooting for the Iraqi government's victory, some people might have thought that perhaps Bush had not been such a complete fool.

Did U.S. Iraqi Policy Harm the U.S. International Reputation? Were We Too "Unilateral?"

The standard story is that the United States was wrong to start the war without UN approval (that is, Russian, Chinese, and Western European), and that Bush's willingness to act with the support only of Britain and the other countries such as Poland, that did support the United States, and the apparent failure of the war, made our allies contemptuous of the U.S.—at least during the Bush presidency. Thus, it is maintained, the war weakened "the alliance" and the U.S. reputation as a responsible international citizen.

Obviously it would have been wrong for the United States to have gone to war without consulting its allies, especially the great democracies, and without giving serious weight to their arguments and opinion. The Bush administration did a great deal of consultation. The claim that it did not do enough is based on two kinds of argument. First people fault Bush's style and character ("arrogant") and challenge the adequacy of the discussions—which is an endlessly inconclusive argument. More important is the argument that says,

"the fact that we didn't do what the majority of the Western European democracies thought we should do demonstrates that we were too "unilateral" and not sufficiently respectful of foreign opinion."

It is widely believed in the United States, although not by most voters, that the Western Europeans are more sophisticated and informed about international affairs than is the U.S. political leadership. This leads to the conclusion that when the U.S. disagrees with the majority of the West European governments the U.S. is making a mistake; full consultation would lead us to do what the Europeans think is right. This kind of thinking sometimes leads the State Department, when there is disagreement with, especially the French and the Germans, to try harder to explain to the President why we should accept the position of the Europeans than to try to induce the Europeans to support the President's policy.

Unfortunately the only way to judge whether on critical issues the U.S. should be willing to act against the views of Western European governments, after hearing their arguments and not being convinced, is to ask two difficult questions. Are our allies right on the merits of the question, or are we right? Second, is their position an objective opinion based on informed analysis applying the values that we share, or are they motivated by considerations—such as commercial interests—which shouldn't affect our decision, or by their national unwillingness to do what is necessary to deal with hard challenges?

It is perhaps too easy for a United States administration to conclude that we are correct and our allies are wrong, because we are responsible members of the international community and they are wimps with a long-standing taste for appeasement. But sometimes such a conclusion—with less pejorative language—may be correct. Such a conclusion would often have been true during the Cold War. So the fact that it is a self-confident, not to say "arrogant," conclusion does not mean that it is incorrect. One has to get to the merits of the question. Who is right? There is no way to take refuge in some objective rule such as going with the majority, or even worse, requiring consensus.

In the case of Iraq, the failure of the West Europeans after 2005 to adopt the cause of the elected Iraqi government when it was under brutal attack by jihadists supported by Iran and Syria, suggests that their policy concerning Iraq is motivated by something else than a realistic concern for, and sound judgment about, their welfare and security and that of the West. Maybe, as during the Cold War, the U.S. was right to do what it thought was necessary.

And if what the United States did was necessary and prudent, any harm to U.S. "reputation" reflects badly not on the U.S. but on those who condemn it.

It should be remembered that European anti-American feelings and stereotypes did not begin with the Bush administration. They go back more than a century. Lincoln, Eisenhower, and Reagan were also generally regarded with contempt by the sophisticated Europeans.

Has the War Produced Anything that Might Justify It?

Of course we have not yet reached the end of the story. Some of what now seem like benefits may fade away.

The biggest effect is that the second most important Arab country has been changed from an enemy of the United States and a supporter of terrorism to a country opposed to jihad and in some degree an ally of the U.S. in the fight against jihadist terrorism.

Second, Iraq is now the most significant Arab attempt since WWII to create some kind of Arab democracy. It has the only free press in the Arab world. Arabs from anywhere in the Middle East can go to Baghdad and read in Arabic a full range of opinions and factual reports not available elsewhere in the Arab world. Since Baghdad is so central to the Arab Middle East, opening up Iraq is like opening up the Arab world to ideas and information previously excluded. The free intellectual life in Baghdad is likely to exert a major influence on the intellectual climate throughout the Arab world.

Third, the jihadist movement suffered major losses and embarrassments in their effort to defeat the United States in Iraq and to bring down the Iraqi government. The "new caliphate" never got off the ground. Al Qaeda in Iraq was clearly rejected by the overwhelming majority of Iraqis—even though they could claim to be fighting against the U.S. foreign invader. Muslims all over the world saw that when Islamists, or jihadists, temporarily had power in some locations in Iraq they abused and mistreated and killed Muslims so badly that they were rejected by the Sunni Muslim communities they had invaded. They lost many men and leaders and failed to achieve their announced objective.

This was a war that the jihadists chose. They thought they could benefit from fighting the United States in their own part of the globe, where the U.S. had the stigma of being an infidel invader. They boasted that they would send the U.S. home in disgrace and defeat, and instead the U.S., after several tough years, showed that it could not be defeated, and instead gained much of the support of Iraqis. Allah did not intervene to bring victory over the U.S.

Fourth the Iraqis were freed from the terrible oppression of Saddam and are now in the process of freely building their own independent country. The biological and nuclear weapons programs that Saddam had created, and which were found to have been put on temporary hold were permanently terminated and will not soon or ever threaten to spread such weapons in the world. And the Iraqi intelligence agency's program of assistance to terrorists was also ended.

It is also quite possible that an alternative source of Shiite leadership to Iran has been created in Iraq. While Iran is much larger than Iraq, the Iraqi cities of Najaf and Kharbala are traditionally the leaders of Shiite thinking. In the future Iran will no longer be the only important source of leadership for Shiites around the world; they can instead follow

the Iraqi ayatollahs. The Shiite line espoused by the Iranian leadership is quite far from traditional Shiite thinking. In fact some of the most prominent Iranian grand ayatollahs now hold themselves aloof from the Iranian leadership, although before June 2009 they could not speak out against the regime. So if alternative ideas are put forth by a revived Shiite leadership in Iraq it may further undermine the position of the Iranian regime at home as well as abroad.

These are big—although partly uncertain—benefits, but each person must decide for themselves whether they justify the costs. One thing is sure, the outcome as it now appears is decisively better than a U.S. defeat in Iraq. Maybe it was unwise to take the risk of the immense costs that would have followed a U.S. defeat in Iraq, but once we went in we no longer had the choice between the harms from Saddam and the risks and potential benefits of going to war. Our choice then was between the great harms from defeat and the great effort required to win. But our success was more than just avoiding defeat. We are achieving gains worth preserving.

What Have We Learned about the Controversies Underlying the Debate about Iraq?

1. We learned that Iraq didn't have nuclear weapons—although that was not argued by those who opposed the war.

2. We learned that when the United States fights a war it, and/or some of its soldiers, will do horrible things that shame the country and lead to hatred and contempt.

3. We learned that the Iraqi government under Saddam had been so weakened that it was not much help in running the country after Saddam was removed and had to be completely rebuilt.

4. We learned that under United States occupation, and using military tactics previously proven ineffectual, Iraq could not produce enough oil to "pay for itself.''

5. We learned that international reporting could move Western policy-making to operate on a fundamentally flawed understanding of the facts. (A lesson taught in connection with Viet Nam by Peter Braestrup's *The Big Story*.)

6. We learned that those who said that, since Iraq is an artificial country its citizens don't care about Iraq, were wrong—or at least too extreme.

7. We learned that those who said that democracy has no real appeal to Iraqis were wrong. (Although it is not yet clear whether Iraqis have yet learned to do what is necessary to keep a democracy.)

8. We have learned that those who said that only a Sunni strong man could prevent a Sunni-Shia civil war were wrong. (While the current government may yet fail to prevent

civil war, it is clear that the chance of success was much greater than the opponents believed and asserted.)

9. We have learned that those who said a Shia-led government would necessarily be dominated by Iran, would be an enemy of the United States, and/or would impose religious repression on Iraq, were wrong.

10. We learned that those who claimed that Iraqi resentment or hatred of the United States would necessarily be so strong that the U.S. couldn't win, were wrong.

11. We learned that those who claimed that any government installed by the United States would be seen as illegitimate and would face a popular uprising, were wrong.

12. We learned that those who claimed that the pre-war external opposition movement was not representative of Iraqis, were wrong.

13. We learned that by removing Saddam the United States exposed itself to the possibility of a defeat that would have had disastrous consequences.

14. We have yet to learn, and it will never be known, whether another strategy for fighting against the attempt to start a big jihad (the war on terrorism) would have had better results.

15. We learned that "world opinion" can cause great harm to the United States and its goals even when almost all the ostensible bases of that opinion are disproved by events.

16. We learned that our allies will not necessarily support us even if it is in their national security interest to do so.

In brief, several judgments of President Bush were wrong, but some of the key arguments of those who argued that the decision to remove Saddam was foolish were also wrong.

On balance, while a case can still be made that the decision to remove Saddam Hussein was a mistake, most of the key arguments for condemning Bush's decision turn out to have been mistaken. There are also strong grounds to argue that removing Saddam Hussein produced more gains than losses—and that many of the losses were not inevitable.

Conclusion: the U.S. and the Future of Iraq

The basic point is that Iraq should be seen not as a mess that we are stuck with having to clean up, but as delicate potential treasure for our interests that we have a strong interest in protecting, encouraging, and building upon.

Nobody thought a few years ago that a leading Arab country might become an objective ally of the United States in the Middle East, but that is the possibility for Iraq if the U.S. recognizes its opportunity and the Iraqis have the ability to hold on to what they are beginning to have.

Egypt is not a real ally. They are vulnerable to Islamists and are too undemocratic for us to be count on or to closely associate with. Similarly Jordan, and also Saudi Arabia, the fortunes of whose citizens are still financing the spread of radical Islam through the world. Turkey may become an ally again but is currently moving in the direction of Islamism and is caught up in an epidemic of anti-American feelings.

Iraq cannot be an ally like Britain, and probably not even like Japan, because for a number of reasons both parties will need to keep a certain distance in the relationship. But Iraq can be of great value to the United States even if we have to eschew intimacy and mutual displays of loyalty and admiration. This means that when thinking about Iraq the U.S. will need to ask what it can do to protect Iraq against internal and external dangers, even though it has no obligation or commitment to do so. But it also means that when thinking about the Middle East the U.S. will normally find that Iraq is playing a useful role, and that the U.S. will often be able to seek its help.

Now the main problem in the United States-Iraq relationship is the very delicate task of disentanglement—of reducing dependence, or to use an appropriate psychological term, co-dependence. Iraq is grown up and they have to get out of the house. It isn't good for them to be dependent on us or to have to listen to our "advice." And it isn't good for us to be responsible for their internal future. We care a great deal about whether they can hold together what they have built while we were there, but that is their struggle and we cannot expect to do much good by interfering, and it would not be good for either of us if we allow ourselves to become responsible for the result.

Daniel Pipes has pointed out that a practical and symbolic example of the need for the United States to disengage is the Mosul dam on the Euphrates, which is in such poor condition, since Saddam's time, that it is in danger of collapsing and killing half a million Iraqis. It has to become clear to the Iraqis and everybody else that Iraq is responsible for the preservation of that dam. The U.S. cannot allow itself to continue to be in a situation where it will be held responsible for any catastrophe but it does not have the authority to fix the problem. And it is not good for Iraq to be able to avoid the tough decisions needed to solve the problem by hoping or pretending that the U.S. is responsible. (Which is not to say that, if Iraq takes responsibility and asks the U.S. for help to implement its decision, the U.S. shouldn't provide help.)

Essentially we should now think of Iraq as an ally which is in delicate circumstances and which needs courting. At the same time as we move toward our new relationship we and Iraq have to disentangle ourselves from the old relationship, while we finish the task of helping them to be able to handle their security problems by themselves. In other words we should work at getting out, not because it was bad for us to be there, but because now

it is time to separate and for Iraq to become as responsible for its own future as is any small state in this difficult world.

While Iraq's main value to American interests is likely to be its influence on the Arab world—and the change in the strategic balance in that world caused by the change from the Saddam Hussein regime, Iraq will also be an important value as a balance to Iran. But we need to be careful not to expect Iraq to take strong anti-Iranian positions. Iran is Iraq's much larger neighbor with which it has to live. Iran has many connections in Iraq and enough influence to make it very hard for Iraq to go strongly against Iran. We can count on Iraq to resist Iranian efforts to dominate it, but we can't expect Iraq not to yield to Iranian pressures to leave Iran alone.

In integrating Iraq into our policy we will need to recognize the prejudice of the Sunni governments against Iraq as a Shiite country. Currently the main concern of the Sunni countries of the region—Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan—is to strengthen themselves against the danger they perceive from the Iran-Syria alliance (with its agents Hezbollah, and to a lesser degree Hamas). This Arab-Persian (Sunni-Shia) conflict affects these countries attitude to Iraq in two conflicting ways. The primary effect is to make Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan ready to ally with Iraq. They are more afraid of Iran than they are against Iraq (or Israel). But at the same time the Sunni countries are very suspicious of Iraq, because it too is Shiite and they have not yet fully rejected the idea that Iraq might side with Iran. And it is easy for them to think that the Shiite government of Iraq might hold against them their efforts to maintain or restore Sunni control of Iraq—since they would have that reaction if the situation were reversed.

The final thread of United States policy concerning Iraq is that the U.S. may for a while have to act to prevent Syria and Iran from too high a level of covert attacks and cross-border subversion against Iraq. If all goes well this should be a temporary task. Soon Iraq should be able to protect its own borders, by being able to give as good as it gets across its borders with Syria and Iran. There's no reason why Iraq has to be a power vacuum or a weak sister in its region. It may be, but it also may be the opposite.

In other words the real Iraq policy questions have almost nothing to do with the question of how fast we can afford to remove United States troops from Iraq, as that question is usually understood. The number of U.S. troops in Iraq is not a very important part of the question concerning Iraq and U.S. policy for the Middle East. The big problem is how we should conduct our relationship with Iraq to maximize Iraq's chance to continue and improve its political success. Because if that success continues Iraq will significantly improve the prospects for U.S. interests in Middle East. ■