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Is This Victory?

by Tommy Franks, Stephen Biddle, Peter Charles Choharis, John M. Owen IV, Daniel Pipes, Gary Rosen and Dov S. Zakheim

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The Meaning of Victory: A Conversation with General Franks

How should victory be defined?

What constitutes victory? I think that is a fundamental question, and it is good for each of us in this country to ask ourselves that from time to time.

When we try to decide whether or not we've been victorious, we have to think, for just a second, what the term "victory" means. Victory means the accomplishment of objectives and goals that we had in mind when we *initially* became involved in a particular conflict. It's also instructive if we ask how we understood victory—what the objectives had been—in the past when our country became involved in one fight or another. In some cases victory has been defined as the removal of a particular threat, either to ourselves or to our friends. But we also find that in almost every case we became involved in wars in order to gain security, either for ourselves or for friends; that at the end of the conflict, as a result of treaty, or pact, or alliance, this security was guaranteed. Security for friends—meaning both allied countries as well as for pro-American forces within a given country—has also inevitably become a part of the objective of victory. That is how we establish the metrics of defining victory.

There are always secondary objectives. The opening and securing of lines of communication are sometimes components in defining what constitutes victory. Sometimes there are economic benefits. Sometimes victory is said to have been achieved when a particular country has been introduced (or reintroduced) into the community of nations, as happened with Germany and Japan after World War II. This may entail the establishment of the rule of law and some form of representative government. And at least in one man's opinion, mine, components of politics on the ground in a particular country—internationally and certainly here at home—will always factor into our definition of victory.

And these secondary objectives also help set the bar for what it means to attain victory, establishing what victory will mean at a particular time. And if there is disagreement with what secondary objectives should constitute the standard for victory, and we want to establish a different set of metrics, then we can look from time to time and ask ourselves how we are doing in terms of coming to victory.

In Iraq, has too much emphasis been placed on achievement of secondary objectives or preferences as the benchmark for victory? After all, the primary objective—the removal of a hostile regime—has been achieved.

I think a lot has to do with the public perception, which in any great period of consternation will be determined in a large part by the media. Now, one can just go about bashing the media, and I think the American people believe from time to time that the media is responsible for the difficulty. However, in my mind, this is not so, and we should not allow ourselves to believe it. But when we have run into a particularly difficult time, and Iraq at this point represents a particularly difficult time, then we as Americans sit back and watch to see, "Well, how are we doing?" And if, for whatever

reason, the media happens to pick up on a secondary objective as the *cause célèbre* and as the overall objective, and begins to simply report and fill American households with a lack of progress in achieving that objective, then pretty soon that becomes the measurement of success.

Now, without a doubt, there has always been this desire to create within Afghanistan and within Iraq conditions where the people in those countries have a representative form of government, and where this government is integrated into the international community of nations. This is a worthy goal. But we have to ask ourselves, "What was it that moved us into Afghanistan in the first place? And what moved us into Iraq in the first place?" The answer is clear: to ensure the security of the people of the United States of America.

So the first question we need to ask, then, is not whether Afghanistan and Iraq are flourishing democracies, but, since 9/11, how are we doing vis-à-vis the protection of the people of the United States? And, with that as the primary objective, it seems to me that we are doing well. Now, in terms of secondary objectives, we continue to get the impression from the media that the overall objective of going into Afghanistan was to give it a pure, clean and representative form of government. That is desirable, but it is secondary to the primary goal. And the same thing could be said about Iraq.

To what extent, then, is success or failure on these secondary objectives America's responsibility?

That question reminds me of two questions that I have been asked a number of times. The two came out of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and interestingly they were the same question and they were just a year-and-a-half or two years apart. Here are the questions: "Will Afghanistan make it?" and, "Will Iraq make it?" And what I have answered consistently for several years is, "I don't know whether Afghanistan will make it or not. And I don't know whether Iraq will make it or not." But I do know, in terms of the secondary objectives, both Afghanistan and Iraq now have what they have not had in quite some time—that is, they have a chance to make it.

Again, let's be clear: Military operations in both of those countries were designed primarily for the purpose of increasing the security of the United States by removing safe havens for terrorists. But once we have achieved that, we need to keep it that way—to prevent both these countries from once again become sanctuaries for terrorism—and that's the secondary objective. And to keep it that way means encouraging the evolution within Afghanistan and Iraq of representative forms of government where the Afghan and Iraqi peoples can see the advantages of Coca-Cola, Levis, McDonald's and apple pie. And the "keep it that way" part is what is really being questioned right now. And at some point, success depends on the indigenous people—in this case the people of Afghanistan and Iraq. The trick is to decide how long it is necessary to keep one's hand on the bicycle seat in either case so that our secondary desire of "keeping it that way" can remain intact. That's the trick.

But we must avoid the blind alley of thinking that the only thing that matters, in Iraq, is the establishment of democracy at all costs. The imperative is to remove a sanctuary for those that George Bush calls the "evil-doers" before they can plot the next attack on the United States of America.

What are your thoughts on how warfare is evolving and our ability to cope with the next generation of conflicts?

One of my favorite American philosophers is Yogi Berra. Yogi says that, "Prediction is extremely difficult, especially when it has to do with the future." So I establish the Yogi comment to say I'm not precisely sure what the future will hold. This is why in this country we will continue to spend large sums of money in order to buy a hedge against the next Battle of Kursk—warfare conducted in the open field, with massed armies of infantry, armor and artillery. But at the same time, if we use the recent past—the previous two decades—as a precursor of the future, then we will certainly see a move towards decentralized warfare involving small forces and with much more sporadic rather than

continuous behavior on the battlefield. That type of conflict has resembled a baseball game, you know, with consistent periods of boredom spiked by incredible adrenaline rushes.

Anytime the nature of warfare in a given period of time changes, it is necessary for the forces aggregated on the battlefield to change. The kinds of forces that we need to handle the problems that we see right now must be extremely agile, extremely flexible, and they must be forces that have as much to do with the management of media as they have to do with the management of infantry and riflemen on the battlefield. And by management of media, I do not mean manipulation of media, but understanding of media, recognition of the fact that media in this millennium is a factor of warfare that is neither good nor bad, but it is a factor that affects the battlefield nonetheless. As these forces have evolved from World War II, they have become agile, flexible and, in many cases, much lighter than we have seen, but in any case still very lethal, very well trained, very light and very responsive. That is what we see today, and our success on future battlefields—as we perceive political objectives on those battlefields—will be determined in large part by how well we have adapted to circumstances that exist today. Who knows what they will be in the future? But I think we'll all have a pretty sure idea if we stop and think about what it looks like today. One needs civil affairs forces because there are political realities on the ground. One needs engineers; one needs light infantry forces. Despite our hedge, it does seem that we will need fewer artillery and armor forces.

I'm interested to ask the question: Why is it, and how is it, that we've evolved away from mass armies to this period of sporadic but extremely violent behavior that creates the potential for nation-to-nation conflict, but ultimately gives us group-against-nation conflict—groups like Al-Qaeda, but also other like-minded folks around the world? First, consider the 1983 Beirut Marine barracks bombing. That was a terrorist attack by a group against a nation. If you move from that to the Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia; and from there to the bombing of the American embassies in East Africa in 1998 where hundreds of people were killed; and if you move from that to the bombing of the USS *Cole* in Yemen in 2000; and then you move forward to 2001 with 9/11; one can see that these are all group-against-nation conflicts and they raise the questions: What caused that? Was that a natural evolution that was brought about by military strength? Or the lack of military strength? Or was that a condition brought about by—what I would describe as—poor politics?

Here's my thesis: I believe that over the course of two decades America indicated to the world and terrorist groups that we will take no national action when we are attacked in this country. Over those twenty years the terrorists became emboldened. They began to think big and they came up with 9/11, and we see the results of that. Does that mean that I blame specific people, specifically the previous presidents of the United States, Bill Clinton and so forth, for having done something wrong over the previous two decades? No, it does not. Rather, I blame the electorate in this country. I blame myself and those just like me. You know, we live in a blessed nation where at any point in time we have precisely the government we deserve. America became more interested in the baseball tickets, the new automobile and the accumulation of wealth, and less interested in the signals that were passed over the last couple decades about this thing that we now identify everyday in our media as terror.

I don't know what the future holds, but I'm pretty sure of what we're looking at now.

General Tommy Franks served as commander-in-chief, United States Central Command, during which he led Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq. He is author of American Soldier (2004).

Defining Victory and Defeat in Iraq

Stephen Biddle
What would victory in Iraq look like?

Many now believe that victory means a friendly, prosperous, self-defending democracy, while defeat means civil war—and the metrics that matter most are thus measures of elections held, Iraqi security forces trained, electricity generated, etc. Such a victory creates a demonstration effect in which Iraqi democracy catalyzes political change elsewhere in the region, removing the underlying cause of Islamist terrorism; a defeat, by this logic, would produce region-wide chaos that would undermine, not facilitate, the larger War on Terror.

Yet this whole analysis is deeply flawed. Iraq may or may not become a stable democracy someday—but the demonstration effect is already lost. Complete success is thus unlikely. But total failure can still be averted.

The challenge here is not to avert civil war, however. Iraq is already in a civil war—and has been for a long time. It is too late for prevention. The real challenge now is termination.

This means we need to shift from a strategy designed for classical counter-insurgency to one designed for terminating an ongoing civil war.

The two are very different. The standard playbook for classical counter-insurgency is to win hearts and minds with political and economic reform while building up the indigenous government's military and handing the fighting off to them as quickly as possible. This makes sense if the enemy is an ideological, nationalist or class-based insurgency waging a violent competition for good governance with an existing regime. Vietnam was such a struggle; Malaya was another.

But Iraq is not. The underlying conflict in Iraq is not between competing ideas of legitimate government; it is between ethnic and sectarian subgroups fighting for self-interest and group survival.

In this kind of war, classical counter-insurgency strategy makes things worse, not better. In particular, the effort to hand over security to an indigenous army just throws gasoline on the fire. In a civil war there is no "national" military that all can regard as a plausible defender of their interests: the subgroup that controls the government controls the state military, but to their rival's population they are the enemy—the problem, not the solution. For Iraqi Sunnis, the "national" security forces look like a Shi'a-Kurdish militia with better weapons. The stronger the United States makes this force, the harder the Sunnis fight back in a struggle all sides see as existential.

By contrast, the standard approach for terminating a communal civil war is to negotiate a power-sharing deal, then to enforce this deal with neutral peacekeepers drawn from outside. The state military cannot serve this purpose, certainly not alone. The whole problem in communal civil war is that the parties do not trust one another; a large, unchecked indigenous army will look to the minority like a threat to their survival. A power-sharing deal is just a scrap of paper if the real power—the military—could fall under the sway of communal rivals. Hence the need for outsiders: Without a reasonably neutral force to police a deal, no deal can be stable and the prospects for settlement are slim.

In a better world, some multinational institution would broker the deal and provide the peacekeepers. This is not going to happen in Iraq. So if the civil war termination script is going to be followed here, the United States is going to have to do the heavy lifting itself.

Current U.S. policy, however, undermines our prospects for this in at least two ways. First, we have little leverage for compelling the mutual compromises needed for real power sharing. Each camp sees potentially genocidal stakes in power sharing: the downside risks if the deal fails to ensure their security could be mass violence at the hands of communal rivals. Against such enormous stakes,

major leverage will be needed to convince nervous parties to accept the risks; U.S. offers of development aid or trade assistance or political recognition are trivial by comparison. And this thin gruel is getting thinner as the United States begins to cut even the modest aid we now provide—the Marshall Plan this is not. Such weak leverage will never persuade Iraqis to take the huge risks involved in real compromise.

Second, we are apparently unwilling to play the role of long-term peacekeeping stabilizer. Though disliked by many Iraqis, in principle U.S. forces could still do this. In recent months American efforts in suppressing Shi'a militias and our comparative sectarian evenhandedness in places such as Tal Afar and Baghdad are persuading Sunnis that we are potential defenders against Shi'a violence. Though Shi'a are wary of American motives, three years of U.S. combat against Sunni guerillas give us the *bona fides* to keep Shi'a trust if we play our cards right. We *can* be neutral—the problem is that we are not willing to stay. Who would trust a deal enforced by a peacekeeper who announces its intention to leave as soon as it can hand its job over to one of the combatants in an ongoing civil war?

Theoretically, at least, the second problem could be solved if we could create a truly national, rather than sectarian, institution in the Iraqi security forces to replace us—a force with true intercommunal balance; with soldiers and officers who see themselves as Iraqis and not as Shi'a, Kurds or Sunnis; that fights any rebel or protects any population regardless of sect or ethnicity; and with the competence and motivation to defeat those rebels in battle. There are a host of practical barriers to accomplishing this in objective reality, ranging from the increasing salience of subnational identity among all Iraqis since 2003, to the reticence of many Iraqi recruits to fight outside their home provinces (in practical terms, a reluctance to do something other than defend their subgroup from outsiders), to the challenge of motivating soldiers to give their lives for a government many see as corrupt or incompetent, to the difficulties of establishing modern systems of pay, leave, resupply and administration in a society which has seen little efficient public administration in the past, to many other challenges large and small.

But a more fundamental problem is perceptual. Even if the Iraqi military were, in reality, a competent, evenhanded, nonsectarian force, Sunnis do not see it that way. All polls show radical differences in trust for the national security forces across communal groups, and the Sunnis clearly do not trust the state's instruments. This should be no surprise: Overcoming this inevitable lack of trust in an ongoing civil war is extremely difficult. This is why the civil war termination literature puts such stress on outside peacekeepers. To build trust across such divides is hard enough in a postwar peace policed by others; to believe Iraqis can do this themselves in the midst of the fighting after the only quasi-neutral force—ours—has departed would require tremendous optimism.

How, then, can the ongoing civil war be terminated without ruinous escalation?

There are options. James Dobbins of rand has proposed a regional diplomatic campaign to induce Iraq's neighbors to use their influence with their Iraqi clients to compel compromise on a power-sharing deal. Given the Sunnis' dependence on outside backers for money and supplies, and the growing Shi'a links with Iran, an agreement by neighboring states to sever this support unless their clients compromise could have real traction. Of course, this means offering neighbors such as Iran and Syria inducements that would make this worth their while; inducements sufficient to do the job could be expensive indeed, in many ways. And even if Iran and Syria cooperate, someone would still have to police the deal. But regional diplomacy could at least provide some real bargaining leverage, which we lack today.

The United States could also begin to use its own military policy in Iraq as a tool for settlement, rather than merely as a quick ticket home for U.S. troops. This would require the United States to make our presence, and our assistance, conditional on the parties' bargaining behavior: Those who compromise must be rewarded with security guarantees, but those who refuse must be threatened with military sanction. Today, U.S. military policy is independent of Iraqis' bargaining behavior: It is

disconnected from our diplomatic strategy. In an ongoing war, military power is a potentially powerful lever, yet today the United States has left military power off the table as a reward for cooperation or a punishment for obduracy. Of course, military force is a blunt instrument: to use it as a bargaining tool could strain U.S. diplomacy beyond its capacity. An American willingness to realign militarily could destroy all sides' confidence in U.S. guarantees if not handled deftly. And any American promise to remain in a potentially dangerous Iraq could well prove beyond the tolerance of American voters.

But unless some new source of leverage is found—and quickly—our chance for even an intermediate outcome in Iraq could evaporate. The best-case outcome at this point is for a negotiated ceasefire in which the Sunni insurgency—not just the elected Sunni political leadership in Baghdad, but the insurgents and their armed leadership in the field—agrees to peace in exchange for concessions that would surely have to include a broad-based amnesty and a role for former insurgents in the government security apparatus, among other requirements. Such a deal would require U.S. troops to oversee its terms. But it also requires at least some level of Iraqi willingness to set aside the desire for revenge in exchange for the hope of peaceful coexistence. With every passing day, however, this reservoir of tolerance is being drawn down as the sectarian body count rises. At some point, it will surely be exhausted and the chance for a negotiated settlement will be lost in an uncontrolled escalatory spiral of violence and retribution. This point of no return does not appear to have been reached yet. Although the death toll rises, it also periodically falls—Iraqis still appear to be able to draw back from the precipice and restrain their combatants. But this will not last forever. And it may not last very much longer.

This brings me back to metrics. The analysis above implies a very different set than those most common in today's debate. Rather than Iraqi battalions trained or hours of electricity in Baghdad, the real measures of success and failure in Iraq are threefold. First, how close are the parties to achieving a power sharing deal and associated ceasefire? Second, how willing is the American public to accept a sustained peacekeeping role sufficient to police any deal the parties may reach? And third, how rapidly is the sectarian death toll rising?

Iraq today is a race between progress toward a settlement and acceleration of inter-communal tensions fueled by sectarian killing. Success requires that a settlement precede the loss of tolerance; defeat will occur if killing outpaces compromise. And to obtain the former rather than the latter will almost certainly require that Americans be willing to accept a long-term role in policing any ceasefire.

For now, the trends in these metrics are not promising: Compromise has been slow and grudging; while the death toll occasionally falls, the overall trend is sharply upward; and Americans are displaying diminishing tolerance for the U.S. troop presence in Iraq. Time is thus not on our side. Current U.S. policy is not yielding an aggressive pace of communal compromise in Baghdad; we risk letting the war slip out of control if we cannot find a means of accelerating the deal-making, and soon. And the longer the fighting goes on and the more Americans die without intercommunal accommodation or a ceasefire, the slimmer the political prospects for a significant long-term American troop presence. If a truce comes soon, trends in U.S. support for Iraqi deployments might reverse; if not, they surely will not. We still have a chance, but this window will not stay open forever. And this implies that we must aggressively seek out new forms of leverage to move this process along soon—before it is too late.

Stephen Biddle is senior fellow for defense policy at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Forget Failure, Let's Avoid Catastrophe

Peter Charles Choharis

If "success" in Iraq means that the war's benefits outweigh the sacrifice of the American and Iraqi people, then it is no longer possible even to conceive of success in Iraq, let alone achieve it.

More than 22,000 Americans have died or been wounded, and the financial cost has passed $300 billion. Iraqi civilians are being slaughtered by the thousands each month—often by sadistic death squads that torture their victims first—while thousands more are being driven from their homes. Billions of dollars remain unaccounted for, even as such basics as fuel, clean water and electricity remain in short supply. Regionally, American influence is at its nadir; while our ability to meet other global interests—including waging war against terrorism—is also at a low.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. Before the war started, the Bush Administration fostered inflated expectations about what victory would bring. America would create a stable and unified Iraq with a representative, constitutional government that respected ethnic, religious and women's rights, which could repel foreign terrorists as well as interference from neighboring countries, and which would enjoy a growing, independent, free-market economy.

Three and one-half years after the American invasion, Iraq is none of these. Despite elections, the government has little power to stop the sectarian violence, end the insurgency or protect its borders. Corruption is rampant, the economy depends on huge American subsidies and fundamental political questions remain unresolved.

Nonetheless, despite the Bush Administration's failure to create a peaceful and prosperous Iraq, we cannot simply walk away and thereby expose ourselves to new threats throughout the world. The challenge going forward for U.S. policy-makers, then, is to salvage Iraq in a way that will enable us to protect our regional and global security interests—even as political support for the war continues to decline and our military continues to suffer.

The question on the table should be: What can the United States hope to achieve within a time frame and at a cost that is acceptable to both Americans and Iraqis?

Chasing objective measures of improvement—like electricity production, hospital construction and fuel prices—will never lead to success, since these can be shattered by a single ied. In order to achieve lasting progress, Iraq's political process must be made to work. To prove to the Iraqi people that their elected leaders—not militias and death squads—hold the key to their future, the Iraqi Parliament must achieve five political milestones in the next 18 months (if not sooner) in order for the country to survive.

The first is federalism. The Iraqi people must decide whether to cast their fate with the central government or to look to more local authorities to protect them. The central government's inability to stop the incessant violence, to provide many basic services, to act independently of the American and other coalition forces and to rebuild the economy has created doubts about its abilities to govern. This doubt, coupled with a deep anxiety about the widespread violence, has created a crisis of confidence that has denied Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki's government a mandate to take necessary, tough measures.

The Iraqi constitution provides a peaceful way for Iraqis to decide where to place their faith and loyalty. Section Five of the constitution permits Iraqis to form "governates" and larger "regions." Governates are supposed to enjoy "broad administrative and financial authorities", while regions are even more autonomous and have "the right to exercise executive, legislative and judicial authority."

One thing Iraqis have proven themselves good at is going to the polls. Having to vote whether to join a semi-autonomous region or to stick with current political arrangements would resolve a lot of uncertainty—as well as provide a new outlet for vying for power and settling disputes.

The Iraqi Parliament is deeply divided over federalism. Sunni and secular parties, along with lawmakers aligned with the Shi'a cleric Moqtada Sadr, oppose federalism, while the powerful Shi'a Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution party backs federalism. Opponents fear that the Shi'a will quickly form a nine-province region in the south—dooming the idea of national unity and depriving the rest of the country of southern oil revenues.

Opponents of federalism have been seeking to delay any vote for at least 18 months, hoping that the central government will be stronger by then. Some delay would be helpful. But after years of at least tacitly backing the insurgency, Sunnis must face the cost of continuing their support. Perhaps the prospect of a Shi'a region will finally prompt Sunni communities to take bolder steps to stop the violence. But if not, that need not mean Iraq's dissolution. Having Iraqis put their faith in more local government authorities—rather than clerical sects for services and militias for protection as many currently do—would still be a vast improvement and a significant step toward secularism and democracy.

For its part, the United States can play the role of honest broker—calming tensions, encouraging compromise, and buttressing the legal and constitutional process. Although a stronger central government might in theory be preferable from the U.S. perspective, resolving this fundamental dispute peacefully is the highest priority.

Constitutional reform is the second milestone. At the same time that the Parliament began debating federalism, it formed a 27-member committee to consider amending the constitution. Just as the prospect of a federalism vote would please many Shi'a lawmakers, so too Sunnis, Kurds and other minorities are heartened by the chance to "fix" a document that many believe enshrined Shi'a dominance. And unlike during the original drafting process, where the United States adopted a hands-off posture, the United States should be very aggressive about encouraging trade-offs to help all sides reach compromises that might otherwise elude them. The United States should also advocate forcefully for greater protection of women and minorities and a secular judiciary with minimal clerical power to overturn laws.

A third issue is the disposition of the oil revenues. Apart from the future structure of the Iraqi government, one of the most significant sources of discord and uncertainty is the distribution of government revenues. In addition to outright oppression, Saddam Hussein deprived his enemies and non-Sunnis of basic needs and development. In recognition of this legacy, the constitution guarantees "an equitable share of the national revenues" to regions and governates. But there is nothing to ensure implementation of this principle.

A public formula for distributing revenues throughout the country, guaranteed for the next five years, would demonstrate the central government's commitment to fairness. While such budget rigidity will come at a cost, it would underscore the importance of the political process and give people a stake in protecting oil and gas facilities.

The fourth milestone would be the development of a regional forum. Not all of Iraq's political or security challenges are internal. Iraq is beset by regional interference—from Turkish intimidation to Saudi funding to Iranian arms. These outside actors are protecting their interests, pursuing their ambitions and striking out at their adversaries covertly. Far from dealing with the Iraqi government and each other directly in a structured format, they exert their power and influence through violent proxies.

One need not assume benevolence on the part of Iraq's neighbors in order to believe that an ongoing forum for these actors, the Iraqi government and representatives from the coalition forces will lead to some common ground. Even if cooperation and compromise prove elusive on many issues, such a forum would at least allow for clearer communications and a chance for mutual progress on some matters. Maliki's trip in September to Iran, and the prospect of more economic deals between the two

countries, may encourage greater Iranian cooperation.

Finally, there is the fate of the militias. With a more revitalized political process tackling tough internal and external challenges alike, thereby shifting power from the streets to the Parliament, the Iraqi government can start to disarm militias.

Countries with political parties that control their own paramilitary forces are weak, unstable and violence-prone. As long as Iraqis can more immediately (and effectively) resolve disputes through violence or the threat of violence, the political process will be superfluous and garner little popular support.

Raiding militia strongholds and weapons caches, reclaiming territory and reestablishing government control will be difficult and could spark more violence—especially if some ethnic groups feel disproportionately targeted. Military disarmament will require strong support from U.S. military forces, although Iraqi forces should take the lead whenever possible.

But to be successful, there also must be a political process in place to reinforce the military effort with appropriate incentives and punishments. The Iraqi Parliament must pass legislation offering militia members broad amnesty and, in appropriate cases, a chance to be trained and join Iraqi military forces. Conversely, continued militia activity must bring not only criminal punishment, but also civil forfeiture of property in order to reduce the financial incentives of militia participation.

As for the political parties that support militias, disarmament will only occur if militias become a political liability instead of an asset. Given that numerous Iraqi political parties are more an extension of militias than the reverse, severing militias from their political wings may be as difficult as military disarmament. But unless and until militias cease being a political force and a security threat, Iraq will never enjoy peace, its government will never exercise exclusive power and the political process will never gain popular trust and respect. Here, too, criminal penalties and property forfeiture should apply to political parties and militia leaders in order to sever those ties.

Except for the disarmament of militias, which would include military action, these goals can be achieved politically—without the use of U.S. hard power and the expansion of violence.

These milestones may seem quite modest in contrast to the Bush Administration's utopian rhetoric about Iraqi democracy. But compared to the other possible outcomes—Iraq's sectarian violence descending into a full-fledged civil war and even escalating into a regional war; an Iraqi government unable to roll back the foothold Al-Qaeda has achieved; Iraq fragmenting into smaller statelets; Iran gaining a puppet state in the south and further influence over the entire Persian Gulf —they offer a reasonable chance of peace and stability.

If not, the result will not simply be "failure" or even a larger strategic blunder; it will be a human tragedy that haunts the United States for years to come.

Peter Charles Choharis is an attorney in Washington, DC, as well as a visiting fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and visiting scholar at The George Washington University Law School. He served as the executive director of the 2004 Democratic Platform.

How Bad Would a Partition Be?

John M. Owen IV
An American victory in Iraq would entail the establishment of a stable regime that does not develop Weapons of Mass Destruction, support terrorism, export radical Islamism, seek the destruction of

Israel or tilt the balance of power toward now-ascendant Iran.

For the past three-and-a-half years, Washington has been acting as if the only way to achieve these ends is to establish a unified constitutional democracy in Iraq. But as dreary reports of sectarian violence continue to arrive daily and Americans lose the will to stay the course, such an Iraq appears more and more elusive.

A constitutional-democratic Iraq requires first having an Iraqi state—an entity with, in Max Weber's words, a "monopoly on the legitimate use of force." The United States destroyed the Iraqi state in 2003 and ever since has been trying to reassemble the rubble and implement constitutional democracy at the same time. America set itself a difficult task. Constitutional democracy is about reason and consensus; states are usually built by force. In a country such as Iraq—really a set of societies that are mutually mistrustful, penetrated by foreign entities, competing for valuable resources and bristling with arms—it may be that relentless, pitiless coercion is needed. The United States, a liberal democracy in an age of instant telecommunications, cannot be relentless or pitiless enough. By insisting on keeping troop levels low, the Bush Administration has shown that it is not willing to pay very much to rebuild the Iraqi state.

As Washington pursues a receding goal, support for disengagement grows. Quitting Iraq would likely worsen the ongoing Iraqi civil war. This intensified war could attract direct intervention from Iran, and perhaps Syria, no longer deterred by U.S. troops and keenly desiring a Shi'a victory. That, in turn, would place pressure on other Iraqi neighbors—Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel—to counter-intervene. Averting or ending a regional war would require a return of U.S. troops. If an exhausted America refused—think the fall of Saigon in 1975—the end would likely be the triumph of the Iraqi Shi'a, who make up approximately 60 percent of Iraq's population and have well-armed and well-motivated militias.

How bad would a Shi'a-dominated Iraq be for U.S. interests? Such an Iraq would likely be authoritarian, inasmuch as Sunni Arabs and Kurds would not accept it without coercion. As a majority-Arab state with its own interests, this Iraq would not be a puppet of Persian Iran. Indeed, during the U.S.-led occupation many prominent Shi'a politicians have walked a delicate line between Washington and Tehran. Yet a Shi'a Iraq would likely lean eastward, which in turn would solidify the nascent and much-discussed "Shi'a Crescent" extending from the Gulf of Oman to the Mediterranean.

A Shi'a Crescent is alarming on its face, particularly in the threat it would pose to Israel. But not only Israel would feel compelled to take counter-measures. Iranian ascendancy would alarm Sunni actors—both states such as Saudi Arabia and terrorist networks—who aspire to unite the *umma* under their leadership rather than that of the Shi'a. These actors would have some interest in drawing together to counter-balance Iranian leadership. A purely realist reading would suggest that the region will enter some sort of equilibrium. Indeed, America and other Western powers might induce Syria—a country ruled by Shi'a-related Alawites but whose population is 70 percent Sunni—to abandon Iran, which would complicate Iranian plans for regional hegemony. Still, this outcome relies heavily on spontaneous power balancing based upon divisions within the Muslim world and also on heroic restraint by Israel.

The risks of quitting Iraq, then, are very great. What other course is open to the United States? Some prominent foreign policy thinkers have favored the partition of Iraq into Shi'a-Arab, Sunni-Arab and Sunni-Kurdish rump states. The remarkable rise of Iran over the past few years compels us to take the three-state solution seriously.

The partitioning of Iraq would be dangerous—more like that of India or Yugoslavia than that of the Soviet Union or Czechoslovakia. Much Iraqi territory, including Baghdad itself, is home to members of more than one ethnic group. Many of Iraq's oil deposits and facilities straddle the current ethnic boundaries, and areas that are exclusively Sunni-Arab have little oil. The risk is great that some oil

fields, or the Sunni-Arab rump state itself, would fall into jihadi hands. Hence, outsiders must assist with the partition, and Iraq's neighbors would insist on being involved. America's ally Turkey is adamantly opposed to an independent Kurdish state, and working with Iran would be a delicate matter indeed.

Should all of these difficulties be managed, however, a three-state solution might better maintain a balance of power in the region between Iran and Sunni actors. A model would be the fragmented Holy Roman Empire (Germany) after the 1648 Peace of Westphalia. Some German states gravitated toward France, others toward its competitors. The system did break down on those occasions when Louis XIV and later Napoleon attempted to subjugate the German states. But in general, the fragmentation of Germany that lasted until 1871 reassured the great powers, and indeed they took pains to preserve it. In the case of a partitioned Iraq, the rump Shi'a state would tilt toward Iran, the rump Sunni-Arab one toward Jordan and Saudi Arabia and the rump Kurdish one (perhaps) toward the United States. If the regional powers agreed to the independence of the three states, they would develop an incentive to uphold the status quo. Furthermore, insofar as the rump states were ethnically homogeneous, they would not themselves dissolve into civil wars, and hence not entice neighbors to intervene on behalf of "their" people.

It is the nature of the Tehran regime that forces us to think about Iran when thinking about Iraq. Were the long-awaited liberal reform or revolution in Iran to come, that country's goals would probably overlap more with those of the United States. Unlike in Sunni states such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, much of the Iranian public—particularly the educated urban young—is oriented toward the West. Their country, unlike Egypt and Saudi Arabia, has actually tried Islamism, and has found it wanting. There are reports that even conservative Iranian forces are worried about the costs that Ahmadinejad's radical policies and statements have inflicted on the country. A constitutional-democratic Iran would still want regional influence, but that influence would be more consistent with U.S. interests.

So regime change in Iran is to be hoped for and encouraged, but not counted on, and certainly not attempted by force. In the meantime, we must proceed in Iraq so as to contain Iran. Three-and-a-half years after the fall of the Ba'athi regime, America's least bad option in Iraq may well be to begin organizing, with Iraqis and other external actors, the partition of the country—a country cobbled together by the British in 1921 and held together ever since by coercion and repression. Partition would not be a happy ending to Operation Iraqi Freedom. If it is too risky, then Washington should send thousands more troops now. Riskiest of all may be continuing the status quo: We are losing, Iran is winning, and we are enemies. One of those three facts must change.

John M. Owen IV is associate professor of politics at the University of Virginia and author of Liberal Peace, Liberal War: American Politics and International Security (1997).

Tempering Ambitions

Daniel Pipes
Whether the Iraqi expedition is judged a success or failure depends almost exclusively on the views of Americans—not those of Iraqis, other coalition partners, or anyone else. So, fellow Americans, let's debate the topic. My take:

It was right to pre-empt Saddam Hussein before he could oppress his Iraqi subjects further, invade another country, deploy more chemical weapons or build nuclear weapons. The world is a better place with this abominable thug in jail, not lording it in his "presidential palaces."

Alongside the easy and fast victory over Saddam Hussein, the Bush Administration made a critical

conceptual mistake—raising short-term expectations too high. Nomenclature alone required Operation Iraqi Freedom to quickly produce a vibrant, healthy, open, calm Iraq, with anything less constituting failure. Talk of a "free and prosperous" Iraq serving as a regional model foisted ambitions on Iraqis that they—just emerging from a thirty-year totalitarian nightmare, saddled with extremist ideologies, deep ethnic divisions and predatory neighbors—could not fulfill.

As Iraqis failed to play their appointed role, frustration grew in Washington. Deepening the trap of its own making, the administration forwarded these ambitions by bogging itself down in such domestic Iraqi minutiae as resolving inter-tribal conflict, getting electricity and water grids to work and involving itself in constitution writing.

Had the U.S.-led coalition pitched its ambitions lower, aspiring only to a decent government and economy while working much more slowly toward democracy, Iraq's progress over the past four years would be more apparent. The occupying forces should have sponsored a **democratically minded strongman** to secure the country and eventually move it toward an open political process; and this approach would have the benefit of keeping Islamists out of power at a moment of their maximal popular and electoral appeal.

The basic coalition message to Iraqis should have been: You are adults, here is your country back, good luck. Transfer some seed money and station coalition forces in the deserts with a clearly defined mandate—defend Iraq's international borders, ensure the security of oil and gas exports, search for Saddam Hussein and his henchmen, prevent large-scale atrocities.

These should-have-beens remain relevant as 2007 approaches. The administration can still frame the debate in terms of U.S. interests, not Iraqi ones. It can contrast Iraq today with yesteryear's totalitarian model rather than a potential ideal. It can distance itself from Iraq's fate by reminding the world that Iraqis are responsible for shaping their destiny.

But the administration shows no signs of gearing down its ambitions in Iraq along these proposed lines. Should it stick with its unrealistically high goals, I fear failure then looms. The implications of that failure, as in Vietnam, will primarily be domestic, with conservatives and liberals returning to their pre-Reagan battle stations and the United States reverting back to what **Richard Nixon** in 1970 dubbed its "pitiful, helpless giant" status.

Daniel Pipes (**http://www.DanielPipes.org**) is director of the Middle East Forum and author of *Miniatures* (Transaction Publishers).

Baghdad or Bust

Gary Rosen
The declared aim of American policy is an Iraq that can "govern itself, defend itself and sustain itself." That is a fine definition of long-term success, but in our present fix, it is too abstract and comprehensive, to say nothing of its embarrassing distance from any fair assessment of conditions on the ground. We need a more achievable, concrete goal, one that would point unmistakably to progress and, ultimately, to a way out. My suggestion? A concerted effort to turn the Iraqi capital into a model city—or at least into a livable, functioning one. Call it "Baghdad or Bust."

In saying this, I do not mean to be flip or simple-minded. Our aims in Iraq cannot be reduced to a slogan. But with the end of the Bush Administration in sight and the 2008 presidential race approaching, our Iraq policy is in desperate need of tangible results, especially if one hopes, as I do, that the United States will maintain a substantial presence there for several more years. The war is "straining the psyche of our country", as President Bush himself recently conceded, and that strain

has proved impervious to the dogged optimism of the administration. Securing and pacifying Baghdad would go some way toward dispelling the sense of despair that now hovers over the whole question of Iraq.

My proposal is not exactly a new idea. During the summer, in the face of mounting sectarian strife and of an insurgency far indeed from its "last throes", the Iraqi government and U.S. military rolled out a new security plan for Baghdad. Additional forces (overwhelmingly Iraqi) were brought in to man checkpoints, conduct searches and take up positions in key neighborhoods; a security perimeter of trenches and other barriers will soon encircle the sprawling city.

Such tactics may bring a temporary lull in the blood-letting, but they are unlikely to transform the brutal reality of Baghdad. With more than six million residents and some 250 square miles, the Iraqi capital is not going to be subdued by half-measures, and certainly not with an overall commitment of just 13,000 U.S. troops (up from 9,000 earlier in the summer). As with our last big idea for Iraq—reclaiming the country block-by-block through a policy of "clear, hold and build"—American boots and dollars are simply spread too thin; we lack the resources to make good on our full slate of objectives.

Critics of how President Bush has waged the war should finally resign themselves to the fact that Iraq is not going to receive a substantial new infusion of U.S. troops, in part because there is so little give left in our already overstretched military. Getting Baghdad right may well require, then, a partial retreat from the Sunni Triangle, where tens of thousands of our soldiers are tied down in an anti-insurgency campaign that, according to recent reports, has yielded few lasting gains. A focus on Baghdad would have definite costs—Al-Qaeda would have freer rein in western Iraq, the capital's Shi'a militias would resist our presence, American soldiers would be more exposed—but the prospects for visible progress would improve dramatically. Better to fight well on one key front than to engage in damage control across several.

Making serious headway in Baghdad would not be just a symbolic victory, a way to generate less dismal news coverage and bolster support at home. An orderly, well-governed Baghdad would give Iraqis a glimpse of what their national future might look like and would provide some breathing room to those genuinely devoted to pluralism and political reconciliation. Brokering some kind of workable constitutional arrangement among Shi'a, Sunnis and Kurds was never going to be easy, but it is almost guaranteed to fail against a backdrop of relentless Hobbesian mayhem. Iraq cannot survive if Iraqi politicians feel safe only in the fortified confines of the Green Zone and if the Baghdad morgue fills up each day with the victims of political murder.

Nor can the United States contemplate an exit under such circumstances. A premature withdrawal might not result in every disaster that has been foretold—a wider regional war seems unlikely—but it would be ugly. Sectarian attacks and reprisals would no doubt intensify, and Anbar province might come to resemble Afghanistan under the Taliban. The odds would tip decisively toward outright civil war. Iraq might stay together, but not on terms the United States would like, and its devolution into a failed state—one deeply entangled with our own vital economic and security interests—might well bring us back in short order.

Leaving Iraq "before the job is done", as President Bush puts it, would also confirm the region's worst suspicions of American motives. It would add yet another grievance to the Arab litany. It would enhance the prestige and appeal of the Islamists. And it would provide a ready excuse to Arab autocrats, whose resistance to liberalization needs no encouragement. Whatever the failings of the American war effort, Iraq remains the critical arena for ushering the Middle East into modernity.

Moreover, our achievements there are real. It is impressive and important that Saddam Hussein no longer menaces the region or oppresses the Shi'a and Kurds, that Iraq has held a series of elections without precedent in the Arab world, that rival political parties and a competitive press now thrive

there, and that the size and combat-readiness of the country's army increase by the day. What we have failed to provide—and what we still owe Iraq—is enough stability and security to make our talk of democratic revolution sound like something more than rhetoric. In Baghdad, if not in the country as a whole, we may yet be able to bring about those conditions.

If we do, we will have fulfilled our basic obligation to the Iraqis, who in the end must decide for themselves whether to remain a nation, and if so of what sort. The United States cannot create a new Iraq, but we can determine whether there is a decent chance to establish one.

Gary Rosen is the managing editor of *Commentary* and the editor of *The Right War? The Conservative Debate on Iraq* (Cambridge).

Focus on the Integrity of Borders

Dov S. Zakheim

Nearly four years into the Iraq War, it has become increasingly clear that the notion of a "successful" outcome requires major revision. Obviously, it is not enough to state that Saddam was deposed and that success already has been achieved. To "declare victory and go home", in the immortal words of Vermont Senator George Aiken, is to ignore the aftermath of Saddam's collapse. The bloodshed, corruption, economic stagnation and political instability that were left in his wake are hardly the indicators of a smashing operational success.

Nor can it be argued that success was achieved when no Weapons of Mass Destruction were found. If that were the case, why are we still in Iraq? Perhaps Senator Aiken would indeed have had our forces come home. But, while Aiken's linear descendants are certainly present on the American political scene, there is still little appetite among the majority of the American public for a complete and immediate withdrawal. Evidently, there is a widespread perception that however success might be defined, it has not yet been achieved.

Can success be postulated in terms of the creation of a democratic Iraq? That approach certainly has its vocal advocates. But it is an increasingly difficult position to defend. On the contrary, it is arguable that democracy as it is understood in the United States is simply not the highest priority of the ordinary Iraqi. What Iraqis, like most people, desperately seek is stability, preferably coupled with certain freedoms—to pray, to earn a living, to live in peace. Elections, however successfully carried out, do not guarantee those freedoms, nor do democratic structures.

Iraq's post-election experience demonstrates that reality—one that is particularly difficult for Americans to swallow, convinced as they are of the superiority of their own form of government. Iraq's seemingly never-ending violence, whether it is termed a civil war, or, more euphemistically, "sectarian strife", has created a sense of instability, insecurity and raw fear, for all but those Kurds living in Kurdistan. Democracy in this environment is nothing more than a sorry catch-phrase.

Indeed, the recent coup in Thailand demonstrates that even military rule can be preferable to democratic structures. The coup has been welcomed by all strata of Thai society, from the king to most ordinary of Thais. In harsh contradistinction to the democracy of Thaksin Shinawatra—the businessman for whom, it seems, even billions were not enough—it appears that Thais have concluded that a military junta affords them a better prospect of stability, safety and the absence of both corruption and intrusiveness into people's lives.

It appears, therefore, that instead of continuing to commit American blood and treasure to the will o' the wisp that is a "democratic" Iraq, it would be far more practical and feasible to focus on the more

mundane but also more critical objective of assuring that Iraq no longer is a source of regional instability. Iraq, after all, is a country that has threatened its neighbors for decades, both before and after Saddam Hussein came to power. In 1948, led by King Faisal II, it contributed forces to the Arab attempt to drive the Jews of the newly created State of Israel into the sea. In 1967, a year before Saddam rose to power, it did so a second time, and again a third time in 1973. In 1961, under the leadership of President Abdul Karim Qassim, Iraq threatened to strangle at birth the newly created State of Kuwait. Thirty years later, still claiming that country as its nineteenth province, Saddam tried to do so again. And in 1980, seizing upon the turmoil in Iran, Saddam attacked that country as well, realizing an intention first articulated by Qassim when he was still Iraq's president. It would be no mean achievement if Iraq were, once and for all, to be transformed (to use a favorite Washington word) into a peaceful state that no longer poses a threat to its neighbors.

Moreover, it is equally important to assure that Iraq's neighbors will respect its territorial integrity; an invasion of Iraq by any of its neighbors could well spark a regional conflagration. To that end it is critical that Iraq remain a unitary state. Any indication that Kurdistan might seriously contemplate independence would almost certainly provoke a Turkish invasion. A fractured Iraq would also constitute an open invitation for even greater Iranian penetration of the Shi'a south. How Iraq is organized within its borders is, however, far less important than making sure those borders remain intact.

It is, of course, desirable that Iraqis can benefit from the many freedoms available to citizens in the West. But what is desirable is not necessarily a justification for an ongoing American commitment to Iraq; only that which is necessary—an Iraq with stable borders that is finally at peace with its neighbors—can justify such a commitment. Such a commitment may take years to fulfill. Nevertheless, it is of a nature that Americans understand and accept—witness the more than fifty years that American forces have been deployed to Germany, Japan and Korea—and it is likely to require fewer troops than are currently deployed in Iraq, thereby making it even more palatable to ordinary Americans and their elected representatives.

America has always had lofty goals, foremost among them the export of its democratic values. But for the people of the Middle East, the stability that would result from an Iraq that is neither international aggressor nor victim is a more urgent and sought-after goal. By adjusting its sights to focus on that goal, as opposed to others, the United States, and its military, can make a true and lasting contribution to the betterment of both Iraq and the entire region of which it is so important a part.

Dov S. Zakheim was undersecretary of defense (comptroller) and the Defense Department's chief financial officer from 2001 to 2004. He is a member of the Board of the Nixon Center.