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Diplomacy and the Iraq War

Strategic Insights, Volume VI, Issue 2 (March 2007)

by [John Tirman](#)

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Introduction

While the Bush Administration has had two skilled, high-profile secretaries of state, international diplomacy has not been its long suit. Exhibit A is the Iraq war, which began amidst fractiousness in the West and resentment and suspicion in the region. As the war effort has gone awry, with each justification weakened or discarded, U.S. diplomacy has appeared disjointed and often incoherent. The recommendations of many seasoned observers—including the Iraq Study Group—have pivoted on opening talks with Iran and Syria in particular. While the U.S. national security team resisted any meetings with Iran in particular—full-scope one-on-one talks especially—it did agree in late February to a regional conference, perhaps recognizing that it is difficult to imagine an acceptable result in Iraq without the participation of all its neighbors.

The president and his team have apparently been trying to intimidate Iran and freeze out Syria, while engaging, on its own terms, the other regional players. Some observers point to the arrival of a second navy carrier group in the Persian Gulf as the White House answer to Baker-Hamilton. As a symbol, it is apt: military force instead of dialogue, attempts to intimidate—especially Iran—in place of cooperation.

Naturally, the story is more complex. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has engaged in her own shuttle diplomacy. Rumors of back channel talks with Syria and Iran persist. Members of the Senate are speaking to both “rogue” states through various means, sometimes quite publicly, and “track two” efforts abound. So far, however, the various entreaties have come to naught. Even the invitation to a regional conference, spurred by the Iraqis themselves, may not yield much, as a State Department spokesman said, “it’s not our meeting.” It will have 30 to 40 countries represented, and no bilateral contacts between the United States and Iran, or between the United States and Syria. Good things could nonetheless occur, as they sometimes do even when the parties seem to be attending for domestic political reasons, but the structure of this effort does not seem promising.

The reason for the failure of U.S. diplomatic strategy, such as it is, hinges on a misunderstanding of the scale, origin, and course of the violence in Iraq. The massive, decentralized violence shapes politics and insecurity in Iraq, drives the neighbors to actions that include support for violent actors and international diplomacy, and beleaguers U.S. attempts to restore order. This misunderstanding, and the fitful diplomacy that follows from it, leaves Iraq as the ultimate victim.

The Road to Damascus

On the surface it would seem that Syria would be easy to approach. They have demonstrated a willingness to discuss a broad range of issues with the United States. They are housing a very large number of refugees fleeing the violence in Iraq, a number that now may number 700,000 or more, a built-in incentive to seek relief. And President Assad has even made overtures to negotiate with Israel, a nascent effort quashed by the United States last year. Syrian mischief in Lebanon, including support for Hezbollah and alleged assassinations of Lebanese leaders, are a major obstacle to normal relations. The U.S. ambassador was recalled following the killing of former prime minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005, but relations were unraveling before then. Limited sanctions were imposed on Syria for its support of Palestinian militants and its failure to follow America's lead on Iraq. The bill of particulars against Assad, in the eyes of the Administration, is long and compelling.

Hezbollah's sparking the summer war of 2006 with Israel worsened America's position in the region, paradoxically, due to U.S. willingness to permit large-scale Israeli retaliation, including sustained bombing of civilian areas and emergency supply of the ordnance being used. It was seen broadly as another pro-Israel gambit by Washington, another exercise in hypocrisy about democratization, but also evidence of growing isolation and even detachment from Arab reality. "The numbing fact that Bush-Rice fail to acknowledge," wrote Rami Khouri, one of Lebanon's leading journalists, "is that Washington now can only speak to a few Arab governments (Saudi Arabia, Egypt and elsewhere) who are in almost no position to affect anyone other than their immediate families and many guards."^[1]

So when the *The Iraq Study Group Report: The Way Forward—A New Approach* surfaced (its recommendations were known weeks before the report's release in December), the possibility of diplomacy with Syria was both urgently pushed by many in the region and the United States, but more difficult than ever because of intentional distancing by the Bush team. Still, former secretary of state Baker went out of his way to urge talks with Damascus when *The ISG Report* was issued, noting his own many trips to Syria when he was America's top diplomat. And the reason was clear: the Syrians, the panel insists, can help directly in the effort to pacify Iraq. As *The ISG Report* states, "Syria can control its border with Iraq to the maximum extent possible and work together with Iraqis on joint patrols on the border. Doing so will help stem the flow of funding, insurgents, and terrorists in and out of Iraq."^[2] It could play a major role in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict—however ambitious that goal may be—which itself would aid peacebuilding efforts in Iraq.

Virtually all U.S. actions have worked against these goals of engagement with Syria. The Bush Administration moved to block Syria's proposal for direct talks with the Israeli government last summer. There have been no known discussions between U.S. and Syrian officials since the American ambassador left two years ago. Sanctions remain in force. The rhetoric toward Syria from Foggy Bottom and the White House remains harsh.

Shortly after *The ISG Report* was released, Secretary Rice made two points with regard to Syria in an interview with the *Washington Post*. In noting that Secretary Colin Powell and Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage had spoken with the Syrians, "it's not a matter of not talking to them; it's a matter that they never act," she said. A *Post* reporter then ventured that the Syrians believed they were being lectured to. "Well, there are certain things that about which there should be no give and take, like stop supporting terrorists is a kind of non-negotiable demand," said Rice. "What they're really looking for is compensation. And then you have to ask—it's very high—and they you have to say, what is that compensation? Well, on the Syrian side, I suspect that the highest priorities are being played out in the streets of Lebanon including about the tribunal, including about Syrian power in Lebanon."^[3] The secretary has repeatedly warned that the status-quo-ante in Lebanon was not acceptable. Her second point, about Syria and Iran, was that if they wanted stability in Iraq, they could take steps to do so themselves.

Both points underscore the U.S. rejection of direct talks with Syria as wholly predicated on Syria's support for political violence—in Lebanon, in Israel/Palestine, in Iraq. In making the case for not engaging Syria, Rice appealed to the global war on terror as the higher good, in effect, and did so not only with that goal as a priority but with isolation of Syria as one element in that strategy. Both the goal and the tactic together trump any gains a dialogue with Assad could yield.

The Persian Challenge

Unlike Syria, Iran presents two additional challenges to U.S. goals in the region. First is the specter of its nuclear development program. Second is the “Shia revival,” as Vali Nasr has called it, or the “arc of Shi'ism”—the observation, or concern, that Iranian influence in particular is growing in the region. Iraq's majority Shia are in some respects aligned with Iran, and this complicates matters for Washington.

Any hint of normal dialogue with Iran was scotched not only by the second carrier group steaming toward the Gulf, but U.S. accusations of Iranian support for terrorism in Iraq—specifically, the charge that roadside bombs produced in Iran and sent to Iraq by the Revolutionary Guard, the powerful cadre close to the Supreme Leader, had killed some 170 U.S. troops. Rice had been saying as much for weeks before a Baghdad press conference in early February unveiled America's case against Iran, although neither the weapons manufacturer nor their political control was conclusively proven.

It was widely speculated that the carrier group, arrests of some Iranians by U.S. troops in Iraq, the charges about weapons, and so on are in fact diplomatic in nature—diplomacy of a kind to placate Saudis, Jordanians, and others worried about growing Iranian influence in the region. Whatever their actual purpose, which surely includes domestic political cover, they all conform to confrontation rather than dialogue. Accepting a place at the regional table—one among 20 or so countries—does not seem to alter that approach significantly.

The larger aims of U.S. policy toward Iran largely revolve around Tehran's nuclear ambitions. The steady progress toward nuclear-weapons capability and an unmistakably tendentious stance toward international safeguards and inspections have put Iran at odds not only with the United States but most of Europe and the U.N. Security Council. Sanctions on certain commercial activities and all trade of nuclear-related goods have been broadly enacted by the global community. While this can be viewed as a discrete problem of nuclear nonproliferation, it relates to the Iraq quagmire in two ways.

First, Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions—if that's what they are—grow mainly from their long and bloody rivalry with Iraq. The use of chemical weapons by Saddam Hussein's forces in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war and his own weapons development accelerated Iran's nascent nuclear program begun under the Shah. While Western intelligence and news media sources have consistently overestimated Iranian nuclear prowess—issuing, from the early 1980s, dire predictions of near-term nuclear weapons capability—the progress of recent years has been tangible enough to warrant alarms.^[4] But they should be seen in the context of regional security.

Second, any American initiatives to involve Iran in stemming Iraq's violence and subsequent peacebuilding will almost certainly need to include Iran's nuclear program, a tall diplomatic order. The American ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, was given the green light by Rice to talk with Iran about their role in Iraq (and apparently had had some lower-level discussions in early 2006), but that door was shut by Bush Administration hardliners in March 2006, presumably because of the nuclear issue and general antipathy to dealing with Iran diplomatically.^[5] Another interpretation of the February 2007 charges by the U.S. military regarding roadside weapons in Iraq has this dynamic going the other way—that the Americans were using this issue as part of a

broad strategy, which includes aggressive attempts to constrain trade, to push Iran to discuss its nuclear program.[6]

As most observers note, the difficulty of divining Iranian intentions complicates any diplomatic or coercive attempts to cope with the consequences. Former deputy secretary of state Thomas Pickering notes this “opaqueness of Iran’s internal politics,” in asking how that might “play out regarding the potential for a negotiation with the U.S.? An Iranian friend once summarized the issue in the best way I have yet heard. ‘When the U.S. has been ready to talk, Iran has not been. And the opposite has also been true.’ Right now, he says, ‘it seems that the U.S. is not ready for talks, but Iran is.’”[7] An absence of mutual readiness to talk has sporadically bedeviled the relationship, but that difficulty is often predicated on what each side believes is important or indispensable to discuss.

Currently, the snarled issues of Iraq and nuclear nonproliferation are linked, but without a suitable opening for Iran to engage. The contrast to the North Korea negotiation could not be sharper: all the conditions that Iran requests for a productive negotiation were offered to Pyongyang, including security guarantees (non-intervention and no regime change). It remains a peculiar inconsistency that what can be served up to the autocratic and repressive regime in North Korea is denied the semi-democratic Iran. The main difference is found in the neighborhood dynamics. The North Koreans were holdouts in a region where American commercial interests are very deeply rooted—economic globalization on American (and Chinese and Japanese) terms is thriving. Our trading and strategic partners there wanted a deal to remove this last major thorn in the side of East Asia. It was a collective diplomatic effort, and a collective desire, to find an accommodation.

The contrast with Iran and the Gulf could not be sharper. The “neighbors” have no agreement on how Iran’s ambitions, nuclear or otherwise, should be perceived or treated, while, according to published reports, the United States has undertaken several regime-change activities in Iran, including covert action.[8] So, at root, Washington’s stance toward Iran appears to be one of raw coercion stemming from primary concern about Iran’s growing prominence in the region. Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns, for example, recently stated that the charges with regard to Iranian meddling in Iraq stems from a more fundamental American demand: “Iran needs to learn to respect us. . . And Iran certainly needs to respect American power in the Middle East.”[9]

That these sentiments and perceptions are borne of U.S. miscalculation in Iraq is stating the obvious, but bears repeating because an old circular dynamic remains powerfully at work: America’s indispensable role in invigorating the Pahlavi regime in Iran, its crucial support of Saddam Hussein’s war against Iran, the longstanding sanctions, et cetera, have not only failed to reverse the Islamic Revolution or contain Iranian regional influence, but appears to have been an enabler of both. Barring some unforeseen breakthrough in the regional roundtable this spring, that incompetent strategy continues to form the basis of current U.S. policy, but is an improbable foundation of successful diplomacy to end America’s Iraq debacle.

The Double Edge of GCC Leverage

In the absence of effective American management of the Iraq enterprise, the typically reticent Saudis and others of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have become active. The Saudis’ incentives for greater diplomacy—seemingly with the tacit if not explicit encouragement of the United States—include concerns about spillover, growing Shia power, and general disarray. For a regime that prizes stability above all else, the chaos of Iraq is highly distressing.

A large number of Saudi individuals have joined Sunni insurgents, and it is widely assumed that sizable amounts of Saudi money—likely some, unofficially, from the vast royal family—is fueling parts of the insurgency. Several alarms have been raised that in the absence of effective U.S. policing of Iraq, the Saudis would step in more aggressively to support their Sunni brethren. So

the concern for stability does not wholly restrain Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni states of the Gulf from playing a role in the violence, however this departs from official pronouncements.

Otherwise, Riyadh is attempting to put some pieces of the broken Middle East together in hopes of avoiding a collapse of the region's rickety security edifice. It brokered a Palestinian concordat between Hamas and Fatah. King Abdullah met with leaders of Hezbollah in December 2006 to seek a non-violent resolution in Lebanon. Saudis have promoted unity of purpose and involvement among surrounding Sunni states, a difficult errand. In all of this, some U.S. support had been evident—much was made of a quick trip by Dick Cheney to meet with the King in November—and is possibly being repayed by the more belligerent American posture toward Iran. At the same time, the Saudis and others are constantly in touch with Iran; much was made of the Iranian threat during Rice's swing through the region early this year, but she was told officially by the foreign minister of Kuwait that Washington must pursue "dialogue with Syria, in particular, and with Iran in the interest of Gulf security in general," a sentiment broadly reflected the region.[\[10\]](#)

A key goal of the Sunni states is to keep Iraq unified. At an important January 2007 ministerial meeting of the GCC+2 (the "pluses" being Egypt and Jordan), a joint statement emphatically underscored the issue. The agreed principles included that a stable, prosperous, and unified Iraq, based on respect for Iraq's territorial integrity, unity and sovereignty is in the interest of all countries; that efforts to achieve national reconciliation that encompasses all elements of Iraqi society without excluding any group should be strongly supported; that sectarian violence aimed at undermining the ability of the Iraqi people to live in peace and security should be condemned; and that all militia should be disarmed and dismantled.[\[11\]](#)

An Iraq that breaks up formally or *de facto* is one that leaves a failed Sunni entity in its middle, wracked by continuous violence and sending rivers of refugees to neighboring states—now believed to be more than 1.5 million in Syria and Jordan alone. That this would be an unrelieved burden on the Sunni neighbors in particular is the specter, along with the possibility of consequent violence, which drives the Saudis, Jordanians, and others toward diplomacy.

But the diplomacy has many sharp edges. The reported attempt by the Saudis to suppress the price of oil—believed to be aimed at Iran—would suppress revenues for Iraq as well. Support for Sunni militants could hasten the breakup of Iraq rather than prevent it. Anti-Iran moves could further activate Saudi Arabia's own sizable Shia minority in the eastern provinces, where its oil production resides. Questioning the legitimacy of Iraqi governance—there is no Saudi ambassador in Baghdad, and only Iran has sent one of all the neighbors—brings unwanted scrutiny to the House of Saud's and other monarchs' legitimacy. Meddling in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can easily backfire, as it has for so many regional players. Promoting Wahhabist education, mosques, and the like in the region, Iraq included—even if not official policy, tolerated all the same—potentially fuels jihadist insurgency.

The United States has welcomed Saudi diplomacy in many of these dimensions, particularly because lines are open from Riyadh to Tehran and to Hamas, lines that Washington has closed down for itself. But it is far from certain what Saudi diplomacy, either as a cover for the United States or on its own power, can achieve. The Saudis rightly seek a unified Iraq and a politically enabled Sunni minority, but the extent to which they will ensure a place at the table for the Sunni Arabs in Iraq is problematic if it includes support for political violence. Saudis also seek to counter Iranian influence—as do the Jordanians, quite openly—but may do so at the risk of degrading the al-Maliki government in Baghdad and its own one million Shias.

For the Bush Administration, over-reliance on Saudi Arabia or Jordan or others of the GCC holds obvious risks, not least because U.S. and GCC+2 interests are far from identical, officially and even more so in Arab societies. The war in Iraq has apparently convinced the Saudis and others in the GCC to strengthen ties to India in particular, which may signal a seismic shift in strategic relations in the Gulf.

The Northern Labyrinth

Turkey's refusal to participate in the war against Saddam Hussein's regime was another sign of growing opposition to U.S. policies in the region, and this continues to vex American diplomats as Iraq unravels. The Turks, with their exceptionally capable military (largely U.S.-supplied) and long history of animus toward Kurdish national aspirations, have several irons in the Iraq fire. The most prominent of these is a threat. If the city of Kirkuk, with its sizable oil reserves, votes to join the Kurdish provinces in a constitutionally mandated referendum this year, Turkey might intervene militarily. The civilian and military leadership have said repeatedly they would do so to protect the sizable Turkomen population of Kirkuk, but most observers believe such an action would be aimed at preventing the Kurds in northern Iraq from declaring an independent state, enabled, as it would be, by Kirkuk's petroleum wealth. Turkey's own enormous Kurdish population, numbering now nearly 20 million, might get similar ideas.

The situation in Kirkuk is volatile. Kurdish militants have clashed with Arabs—Sunni and Shia—in an attempt to gain control of the city in advance of the referendum. Before Saddam's "Arabization," the city was mixed ethnically, with both Turkomen and Kurds claiming preeminence (a census in the 1950s showed neither was a majority). Whatever the claims, there is now widespread fear of mounting violence, and this fuels both Kurdish nationalism and Turkish wariness.

The complexities of the north do not end there, however. The Kurdish provincial government has allowed Kurdish guerrillas, the successor to the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party), to operate against Turkey from its territory in Iraq. The PKK's fifteen year insurgency against the Turkish state took nearly 40,000 lives between 1984 and 1999. It has revived, some say, because of the prospect of Kurdish independence. The Turks have never successfully accommodated the relatively mild demands of their Kurdish population—mainly cultural and political rights—and this stirs the new guerrilla activity as well. The PKK long operated from the Kurdish areas of Iraq, and Turkish military moved into Iraq often in hot pursuit.

The U.S. role in coping with this confrontation has been puzzling. A special envoy for countering the PKK was appointed last autumn, but he seems to have had little impact. In January, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey sharply rebuked the United States for telling Turkey to stay out of Iraq's internal affairs. "We have a 350 km border with Iraq. We have historic relations," he told a party congress. "The United States is 10,000 km away from Iraq, and yet is it not intervening in Iraq's internal affairs?"^[12] The PKK issue is further complicated by reports that the United States is supporting Kurdish militants in Iran as part of a strategy to stir ethnic division to bring down the Islamic state.^[13]

While some of these scenarios and charges seem improbable—a Turkish intervention in Kirkuk would be difficult logistically and would ruin what remains of Ankara's hopes to join the European Union—they reflect both the knots that grip the region and the absence of American diplomacy. Some simple facts also create difficulties—both pipelines from the Kirkuk oil fields pass through Sunni Arab provinces, and one goes through Turkey. The oil wealth is meaningless if it cannot be transported.

Despite pleas to delay the referendum from prominent advisory bodies, including the Iraq Study Group and the International Crisis Group,^[14] U.S. diplomacy here seems ameliorative at best, "managing" the Turks and allowing the absorption of Kirkuk to go forward, possibly as a reward for the Kurds' stalwart support of the American mission in Iraq. The relative punishment of the Turks brings to mind the anger U.S. officials felt when Turkey refused participation in the war's launch, but U.S.-Turkish relations have been strong over the years. The relative U.S. silence about human rights abuses in Turkey is probably the weight balancing the pro-Kurdish policy in

Iraq, with stout reminders that military intervention in Kirkuk by Turkey will end any prospect for EU membership. That may be just enough to keep the peace, at least in through 2008.

Violence and Diplomacy

The Kirkuk referendum was a key to the constitutional negotiation in 2005 that also allowed the governorates or provinces of Iraq to form into “super governates,” essentially dividing Iraq into three or four entities with a weak central state. The Shia, led in this by Sayyed Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, opted for the Kurdish formula for autonomy, a gambit enabled by the Shia’s superior size and oil wealth, and its alliance with Iran. The constitution thus achieved in effect what U.S. policy purportedly opposed—the drift toward partition. The specter of *de facto* partition leaves the possibility of a failed Sunni mini-state in the center of Iraq, and Baghdad, not allowed to join any of the super governates, remaining vulnerable to sectarian and ethnic fighting.

The constitution—considered to be one of the achievements of U.S. diplomacy—not only reifies the divisions that can stoke more mayhem, but should be seen as a consequence of the violence. Al-Hakim and his cohort likely saw the prospect of a Shia-led state being responsible for subduing a Sunni insurgency for years to come, and retreated into their nine-province homeland. The violence, which was taking a high toll in 2005 and has grown worse since, is acting as an independent force on Iraqi politics, fragmenting security, and leaving to diplomacy what police and armies and parliaments cannot achieve.[\[15\]](#)

That the violence is colossal in scale is now denied by few. The most methodologically sound account has fatalities at several hundred thousands, and refugees and internally displaced now numbering three million.[\[16\]](#) This scale of violence has enormous consequences for the neighboring states, as noted earlier, but it also drives the politics within Iraq, with profound consequences for U.S. diplomacy. Not only has it meant that U.S. forces are to be indefinitely sustained at their current levels of 130,000-150,000 (and with their large operational edifice in Qatar, Kuwait, etc.), but that continuous diplomatic efforts are expended on rearranging the security furniture, so to speak, with successive governments in Iraq. While almost all evidence points to the violence being carried out by Iraqis themselves, in addition to that of the coalition forces, considerable effort is also spent on excluding foreign fighters and material support. Yet as the Sunni states and Iran see their coreligionists at risk, and violence grows generally, they are more likely, rather than less, to come to their aid militarily.

A bidding up process seems to have been at work from early in the war. The application of armed force by the United States partially explains both the Sunni insurgency, which in some respects was defensive (in their eyes), and the consequent Shia violence via the militias.[\[17\]](#) The new counter-insurgency strategy promulgated by General Petraeus essentially acknowledges that. The surrounding states have acted similarly, building up militant groups as defensive maneuver, however unofficially and covertly. The grinding symptoms of Iraq—its economy languishing, basic services disrupted, health care system in a state of near collapse, and so on—also contribute to this escalation, as membership in gangs and militias appears more and more attractive, and politics takes on the dynamics of a failed state.

The inability to recognize the sources of violence and the effect violence has on the politics of Iraq and the region is a principal failing of the Bush Administration’s war strategy and its consequent diplomacy. Violence, and the central role of U.S. forces in the violence, has skewed the political process in Iraq toward defensiveness, sectarian protectionism, and outside interference on behalf of sectarian or ethnic allies. It has proliferated violent actors and groups, whether purely indigenous or connected to other regional actors. It undermines economic and other reconstruction. The Iraqis’ gnawing sense of insecurity drives the crisis of displacement.

President Bush and his advisers have tended to see the tumult of Iraq as the work of former Ba'athists; *ihadis*, particularly al Qaeda in Mesopotamia; Iranian militants, especially those from the Revolutionary Guard; and Syrian intelligence—everyone but Iraqis, broadly conceived, and the coalition forces themselves. This leads to a distorted sense of how diplomacy should be applied. When asked about the Iraq Study Group's hope for approaches to Iran, for example, Secretary Rice said "I don't see that there is anything to negotiate with the Iranians about the stabilization of the Middle East," she told a French reporter. "The Iranians know what to do to stabilize the Middle East. . . They can stop supporting death squads in Iraq. There are many things that they could do and I think they know what they are. They don't need to be told."^[18] The assumptions in this and similar statements are that it is the Iranians who must act to stabilize the region; that the death squads they allegedly support are a key to understanding Iraq's problems; and that U.S. diplomacy is about lecturing others.

Here, the willful ignorance of an accurate portrait of violence in Iraq, or distorted and accusatory depiction of violence, diverts Washington from effective diplomacy. Similarly, and related, was Rice's bizarrely callous reference to the summer 2006 Israeli bombing of Lebanon as "the birth pangs of a new Middle East." Consider, too, President Bush's frequent assertions about foreign fighters in Iraq, often linked to al Qaeda, when most independent assessments, including those by the Pentagon, put such numbers at 10 percent or fewer of overall insurgents.^[19] If most of the problem of violence is from the outside—outside terrorists or terrorist states—then U.S. diplomacy is more likely to be coercive. If one sees the problem of violence as stemming from the dynamics of the U.S.-led war and its unintended consequences, then including Iran, Syria, and others in trying to find a commonly beneficial solution makes much more sense.

Another end of the same stick is the U.S. insistence that democratization—the moral bedrock of the U.S. presence in the region—is overdue and that it is plausible to introduce it via armed force. In practice, the terms and conditions of such democratization are largely, or exclusively, of American definition. Several keen observers of the post-Saddam effort in Iraq have noted how badly the political development process itself has been forged, including the subverting of the building blocks of democratic process,^[20] an inconsistency that is regional in scope and widely recognized as such. It is most obvious in the active opposition by the United States to triumphs of Hamas in Palestinian elections and Hezbollah in Lebanon. But democratic process has also suffered as a result of the war elsewhere, notably in Jordan, and, quite plausibly, in Iran.^[21]

If democratization justifies the military activism of the United States, but that activism has actually undermined outbreaks of popular rule and retarded others, then the entire normative edifice of U.S. diplomacy is vulnerable to collapse. It is arguable that such collapse has long been underway. What remains is the restoration of order. That requires broad and inclusive diplomacy, just as the Iraq Study Group advised, because violence—more violence—is an imperfect, and probably counterproductive, instrument. It always was.

About the Author

John Tirman is Executive Director of MIT's Center for International Studies. A political scientist, Tirman is author, or coauthor and editor, of ten books on international affairs, including *The Fallacy of Star Wars* (1984), the first important critique of strategic defense, and *Spoils of War: The Human Cost of America's Arms Trade* (1997). In addition, he has published more than 100 articles in periodicals such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *World Policy Journal*, *The Nation*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *International Herald Tribune*. (For a list and archive of articles, see www.johntirman.com.) Before coming to MIT in 2004, he was program director of the Social Science Research Council. From 1986 to 1999, Tirman was executive director of the Winston Foundation for World Peace, a leading funder of work to prevent nuclear war and promote non-violent resolution of conflict. In 1999-2000, Tirman was Fulbright Senior Scholar in Cyprus and produced an educational Web site on the conflict (<http://www.cyprus-conflict.net>).

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13. Hersh, ["The Iran Plans,"](#) *The New Yorker*, April 17, 2006, and ["The Next Act,"](#) *The New Yorker*, November 27, 2006, *Op. Cit.* Numerous unconfirmed reports are circulating to this effect, and Ali Larajani, a top Iranian defense official, reportedly told the Turkish government that the U.S. military had met with the PKK. See Cengiz Candar, ["With Larajani in Ankara, the new climate of Ahmadinejad's letter to Bush,"](#) May 10, 2006.
14. International Crisis Group, ["Iraq and the Kurds: The Brewing Battle over Kirkuk,"](#) *Middle East Report*, No. 56 (July 18, 2006).
15. For a fuller explanation of this, see the report from a series of workshops at MIT, ["The Crisis of Governance in the Gulf: Legitimacy and Stability in a Dark Time,"](#) Spring 2006.
16. Burnham, Gilbert, et al, ["Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey,"](#) *The Lancet*, October 2006. Displaced are estimated by UNHCR in their regular reports.
17. On the effect of U.S. application of deadly force and its boomerang effect, see, for example, Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006): 264-267, *inter alia*. In another account, a U.S. commander speaks of the same problem early in the fight: "Frustrated with the insurgent attacks and unprepared to deal with the complexities in Iraq, there was 'a default to meet violence with violence on part of some U.S. forces,' [Brigadier General John] Kelly observed, which led to civilian casualties and hardened the attitudes of many Iraqis against the Americans." Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon, 2006), 494.
18. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, ["Interview With Christian Malar of France-3 TV, Paris, France,"](#) January 25, 2007 as presented on the *U.S. Department of State Website (Diplomacymonitor.com)*. Interview with Christian Malar of France-3 TV, Paris, France (January 25, 2007).
19. Mark Mazzetti, "Insurgents Are Mostly Iraqis, U.S. Military Says; Bush, Kerry and Allawi have cited foreign fighters as a major security problem," *Los Angeles Times*, September 28, 2004.
20. Joost Hilterman, "Out of the Ashes...and into the Frying Pan?" Memo for workshop on Iraq, MIT Center for International Studies (April 27, 2005); and Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation And the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2005).
21. Marc Lynch, "Jordan and the Iraq War," paper presented a conference cosponsored by the Brandeis Crown Center and the MIT Center for International Studies, ["The War in Iraq: Regional Implications,"](#) October 27, 2006. The argument about Iran is common sensical—"axis of evil" rhetoric from Bush created more traction for hardliners in Iran. It is more tangible now with revelations about the 2003 offer from Khatemi to Bush, which was rejected; that rejection became fodder for Ahmadinejad's presidential bid, which portrayed Khatemi's "accommodationist" policies as a failure, to be replaced by a tougher stance, which has included anti-democratic practices within Iran.