

# Mesopotamian Muddle

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Articles & Testimony

**R**arely have we faced more daunting problems in the Middle east and seemed farther away from resolving or even defusing them. There is surely no more important foreign-policy priority than finding ways to ameliorate the challenges and conflicts that confront us in the region. This won't be done with slogans or declarations or even "surges" that are disconnected from a clear political and diplomatic strategy; nor will it be done with international meetings that are not thoroughly prepared and choreographed in advance.

America's interests in the Middle East can be advanced with the application of real statecraft -- not a hallmark of the Bush administration. Good statecraft marries objectives and means. It depends on reality-based, not faith-based, assessments that make it possible to shape tangible objectives while also identifying the means available for achieving them.

Often our own available means will be insufficient to achieve the objectives we set for ourselves; we need to persuade others to join us. That means framing our objectives in ways others are likely to accept. It is far easier to get friends and non-friends, who have substantial influence or leverage over others, to cooperate when they agree with the objectives we have established. Working intensively to forge productive partnerships is a central task of statecraft.

Certainly, even the best application of statecraft will not always succeed in achieving the objectives we believe to be important. This does not mean giving up our desire to transform unacceptable realities, but it requires us to understand those realities before we try to change them.

So how well are we doing now in terms of matching our objectives and means in the Middle East today? And, if the answer is not well, what do we need to do differently? . . . ❖

National Interest

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