Defining the Postwar Priorities in the Middle East

by Patrick Clawson **(/experts/patrick-clawson)**, David Makovsky **(/experts/david-makovsky)**

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Patrick Clawson (/experts/patrick-clawson)

Patrick Clawson is Morningstar senior fellow and director of research at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

David Makovsky (/experts/david-makovsky)

David Makovsky is the Ziegler distinguished fellow at The Washington Institute and director of the Koret Project on Arab-Israel Relations.

In-Depth Reports

Peter David: Robert Satloff said he wanted a British ally to be present at this meeting. So in one sense, I owe my presence here to the work of the Seventh Armored Brigade, the British unit that captured Basra. The way the brigade captured Basra was quite unusual. They approached Basra, sat around in their tanks, brewed a lot of tea, and had interminable conversations with the media. Eventually, the Iraqis in Basra were just bored into submission. (Laughter.) I hope I will not do the same job here today.

It is especially pleasant for me to be on this side of the Atlantic because the Economist for the past six months has been a strong proponent of the need to disarm Saddam Husayn, if necessary by military means. This has been an extremely lonely position in Britain. The United Kingdom may be America's closest ally in the Iraqi war, but it has been difficult to enjoy dinner parties in Britain without the war coming up in conversation and losing friends by the dozen. So it is nice to be in a slightly different milieu now.

I mention this because the first point I would make is that to many Europeans, including many Britons, the overwhelming feeling throughout this crisis has been that America is a bigger problem than Iraq. It is necessary for an American audience to take that idea on board. Even in Britain -- the country that fought alongside you in this war -- the dominating idea that comes out of personal conversations, political analysis, and newspaper editorials is that we live in the realm of a single superpower and that it has to be constrained somehow. If this is true of Britain, how much truer it is in continental Europe. And, of course, how much truer it is of attitudes in the Middle East among Arabs who feel at the outset that they have reason to fear the United States and now have real reason to fear America's ability to intervene militarily in their region.

I would emphasize as much as I can that America's moment in the Middle East comes in a context of great suspicion, doubt, and skepticism about its motives. My first suggestion of a postwar priority for America is this: stick to Iraq. That is to say, do not take the idea of regime change, democratization, or liberal or social revolution beyond the

bounds of Iraq.

That might be very difficult because there is now a power vacuum in Iraq, and many outside the country will try to exploit that power vacuum in various ways. They obviously will not try to take the Americans on militarily, but they will exploit the sectarian splits within Iraq to build their own spheres of influence within that country -- to which the American response should be a simple message: "If you don't mess with us in Iraq, we won't mess with you."

I would like to think that the strong warnings to Syria coming from the president and others in the Bush administration in the past few days are delivered in the context of saying, "Don't mess with us, and we won't mess with you," rather than, "You're next on the list." America should want to bribe Syria off right away.

My second priority would be to fulfill the president's promise that there will be a Palestinian state by 2005. That date is very near, and this is at least a fifty-year-old conflict; 2005 might not be an achievable date. Nonetheless, now is the time to make a full-hearted effort to get to peace between Israel and the Palestinians. The Roadmap is not a bad device, and the Quartet -- the club of the United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations that is working on the Roadmap at present -- is not a bad instrument, either, for making progress. But I would add a note of caution: the Quartet should be aimed at getting peace between Israel and the Palestinians and not utilized for some other purpose such as repairing the rift across the Atlantic between the United States and its allies.

Palestine and Israel are simply too important and too difficult for this complex piece of diplomacy to carry the traffic of other agendas such as giving the Europeans a special role, soothing French anxieties after the recent war, or trying to repair relations between the power blocs. Let the Roadmap and the Quartet focus on the peace process and nothing else.

My last suggestion, which is really a question to the next speaker, is why not work toward a weapons of mass destruction (WMD)-free zone in the Middle East? Normally, when one proposes this sort of thing, it is assumed to be something utterly unachievable. But if we cannot do it now, when will we ever be able to do it?

This war has changed the balance of military power in the Middle East in an enormous and far-reaching way. One could argue that the military threats to Israel have been diminished far more than ever before. We have seen a demonstration of how the sort of technology that the Americans have brought to the battlefield makes it almost inconceivable that a country with similar technology, such as Israel, would not prevail in a conventional war against its neighbors. It would make a lot of sense if it were possible to begin discussing the idea of denuclearizing the Middle East in return for the Arab states giving up the chemical weapons programs that they undoubtedly have.

This would also send a signal to other countries in the "axis of evil" that it is not just military power that we want to use to bring about WMD-free zones but armscontrol agreements as well.

Robert Gallucci: I will focus on issues of WMD, particularly nuclear weapons, for two reasons. First, the primary threat to American security comes from the intersection of international terrorism and WMD, particularly nuclear weapons. This was an emerging lesson that we were aware of intellectually before September 11, but which we internalized afterward. The prospect after September 11 was not only of another aircraft or another building being attacked but the possibility of al-Qaeda armed with a nuclear weapon attacking an American city. That image informed this administration and led directly to the axis-of-evil speech that linked proliferation of nuclear weapons in a traditional sense to the possibility of those weapons being transferred to a terrorist group. That is what the axis-of-evil speech was all about, and that is what the National Security Strategy released in September 2002 was largely about.

The second reason is because concern about Iraq's WMD was a large part of the rationale for the war. There was an argument that Iraq still had at least chemical and biological weapons, that it had links to terrorist groups including al-Qaeda, and that there was a real danger of transfer. Whatever capability Iraq had would eventually get into the

hands of some entity against whom we had no defense because of terrorists' unconventional way of attacking, and whom we could not deter because terrorists are prepared to accept death.

We need to make sure that the occasion of the end of the war with Iraq is one in which -- to the extent that these weapons and weapons technologies are still there -- we make sure they do not now spread. There is a similarity to the end of the Cold War and what happened when we recognized that there was no longer a Soviet Union. After the great joy at the prospect of disarmament and arms control, we recognized that we faced a much weaker state with a lot of fissile material. It had biological weapons programs, it had enormous quantities of chemical weapons, and it had the scientists and engineers who built them. It had ballistic missiles, and there was no central authority to control them all.

I do not want to draw this analogy too tightly, but something similar could be true in Iraq right now. I am concerned that there are chemical weapons somewhere. I am less sure about biological weapons, and I am pretty sure there are no nuclear weapons, but somewhere there are probably munitions filled with mustard gas and nerve agents. There is probably equipment in the chemical/biological area to manufacture these agents, including fermenters or bioreactors.

In the nuclear area I am still concerned about technical components. I am concerned about plans. I am concerned about the triggering package for a nuclear weapon and the designs to build nuclear weapons. I am concerned about the scientists and engineers. Where are they? Where will they go next?

In the Russian case we created science centers, one in Moscow and another in Kiev. In a sense it was like a dating service. It matched scientists and engineers with projects that were outside the weapons area. We engaged them in peaceful, nonweapons activity so they could be compensated and therefore not drawn off by others who were interested in their expertise. We might think of ways to engage the Iraqi scientists and engineers who have expertise in nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and in ballistic missiles. That is a first priority. We do not want this material, this technology, or these people to go to other countries, whether through Syria or Jordan. We do not want any part of it ending up with al-Qaeda.

The second priority is to reconsider our policy toward Iran -- that is to say, to actually have a policy toward Iran. We have learned that the Iranians are further along in their uranium enrichment program, and they are clearly also going after plutonium production as well. Otherwise, they would not have heavy-water production capability that would be aimed at a heavy-water moderated reactor, which would allow them to use unenriched uranium to produce plutonium for a nuclear weapon.

The Iranians have been working long and hard on ballistic-missile capability. They have what is called a Shahab-3, which is a knockoff of the North Korean No Dong that has been improved somewhat by Russian technology and can reach Israel. They are also working on longer-range ballistic missiles. Iran has shown a willingness not only to support terrorist groups but also to transfer weapons to them. Putting this all together suggests that the situation in Iran will not improve over time and that we should not wait any longer. We need to find a way to engage Iran and address these problems before they have to be addressed in ways that are more costly.

Third, we need to give our full attention to the problem of Pakistan. If I had to list the sources of greatest threat to the United States right now, I would put Pakistan at the top of the list. I do not mean the Pakistani government; I mean that the situation in Pakistan creates a threat to the United States that is unmatched. In the case of Pakistan, we are not talking about the potential to produce nuclear weapons. Pakistan has an inventory of nuclear weapons based on uranium and is building nuclear weapons based on plutonium. It has stockpiles of both elements. There are al-Qaeda sympathizers within the scientific establishment and almost certainly within the military as well.

This is not a good situation. It gets worse every spring when tensions increase between India and Pakistan. We need

to find a way to diminish the probability of war between these countries and, most importantly, to increase the confidence that as long as these materials are there -- as they will be for a long time -- they do not find their way to the Middle East and, ultimately, threaten our security and other states whose security we value.

Patrick Clawson: For too long in Washington the view was that democracy in the Arab world was a strategic problem for the United States because democracy would complicate the drive for a Middle East peace process. Only autocrats like Anwar al- Sadat in Egypt or King Hussein in Jordan could sign a peace treaty with Israel, we were told. Democratization could bring radicals to power as almost happened in Algeria. And anytime you raised the question of democratization with Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, what you heard from him was, "You mean you want me to let the Muslim Brotherhood win power? No way."

Well, that view was profoundly mistaken. By blocking democracy in the Arab world, discontent brewed, the region's problems multiplied, and young people saw no way to express their discontent within the framework of established institutions. As a result, radicalism in the area grew. Not surprisingly, the region's rulers did not want to see that radicalism directed at them, so they encouraged the diversion of radical discontent toward a foreign enemy, namely the United States.

We tolerated this. Indeed, we spoke in think-tank hallways about how this was a good thing because it allowed a relief valve, blowing off steam that might otherwise threaten the governments in the region.

We learned on September 11 the heavy price -- thousands dead -- that would have to be paid for this way of thinking. We cannot continue such a policy without expecting more anger to be directed against us. We have an interest in seeing that the Arab world's young people have hope that they can bring about change within the framework of their systems.

So we have an interest in democratization, but we also have an interest in ensuring that democratization is brought about as a process and not through instant elections. If one tries to have instant democracy without creating the building blocks of democracy, if one tries to have elections before a free press and political parties have emerged -- and with them the habits of criticism and compromise -- if one has premature elections, then the only ones who are organized in society will be the totalitarians of the past and the radicals who organized illegally under their rule.

Forced to choose between the totalitarians and the radicals, not surprisingly, people may go for the radicals, and we will see results such as we saw in the Algerian elections. That is not because of enthusiasm for the radical cause; it is because elections were held when there was no one else organized in society, when there was no functioning free press, and when there had not been the tradition of political discussion and compromise necessary to make democracy work. And so we have to start this process of liberalization, as President Bush has eloquently put it, first with freedoms and liberties. Down the road, we can imagine getting to elections.

This process will not be instantaneous. It is worth reflecting on our own history. We are proud of our Jeffersonian democracy, but we all-too-seldom remember that in Jefferson's day, when those great Founding Fathers created the institutions of which we are so proud, suffrage was limited to white, male property owners. It would be eighty years before slavery was abolished and another sixty years before women got the right to vote.

The process of political liberalization will strengthen U.S. friends in the region. There is a false dichotomy in which some people talk about political liberalization on the one hand, and on the other hand ask how we can help our friends in the area. In fact, our friends in countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt would be much stronger if they were to open up their political systems and broaden the base of those systems. The narrow base of their rule, in fact, threatens them as much as anything else does.

This process of political liberalization is something the more enlightened members of the ruling elite understand they need over the long term. Whatever shortterm risks they run, the long-term stability of their political systems

depends upon liberalization, and we should work with those more enlightened elites who understand the latter's importance.

I would make an analogy to the days twenty years ago when I joined the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and we went to the region to argue in favor of economic reforms. I remember many long meetings in which top people fought about the question of whether eliminating subsidies and privatizing state-owned enterprises would bring a revolution that would lead to the fall of the Egyptian government. In fact, it was economic reform, when finally adopted in the early 1990s, that led Egypt to a period of prosperity and growth, which then weakened and undercut the radical movements. That is what we need to see in this area: supporting our friends by promoting the process of political liberalization.

David Makovsky: U.S. priorities in the postwar period, to summarize what we have heard presented thus far, should be to embolden Middle Eastern moderates, whether through the reconstruction of Iraq, democratization and liberalization, or promoting a Middle East peace process while constraining extremists, rogues, and proliferators of WMD. In an ideal world all these priorities would reinforce each other, and moreover, an increase in U.S. credibility in one area could help the United States in the other spheres. My piece of this is the Middle East peace process. I will describe productive ways to go about it and what we can do to ensure the conditions for success. I am not here to talk about a blueprint for any final-status deal; enough has been printed on that already.

The most important condition for success is responsibility. What happened in the 1990s is that nobody in the process -- the United States was the exception -- expended a lot of political capital to make this thing work. Leaders have to expend political capital. On the Palestinian side, it means framing this issue not as a decolonization process but as a reconciliation process. That means taking on Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other such organizations. It means talking about reconciliation and talking about the moral legitimacy of Israel. Political capital clearly is not spent on that side.

Neither was it spent by Arab leaders. These leaders do not like to get out ahead of their publics. Perhaps this is rooted in the fact that they do not see themselves as democratically elected. They often lead from beneath the table, which has been a regrettable problem.

On the European side there was neither a desire to spell out the consequences of suicide bombing, nor a willingness to use European leverage as we got into the final round.

On the Israeli side, no one wanted to take on the rejectionists and the settlers. It was considered hard to do and so would be done at the end. To be fair, this process did not fail because of the settlements. Prime Minister Ehud Barak was willing to take down dozens of them. Settlements were not why the Oslo process failed, but they were an irritant, which gets back to the question of responsibility and expending political capital.

We are now at the most promising moment of the last two-and-a-half years. It is hard to believe, given all the bleak news. But in fact, the Palestinian finance minister is a former IMF official. And the prime minister, just named by the Palestinian Legislative Council, is someone who spoke out vocally, at risk to himself, against the militarization of the intifada. These are hopeful signs. But we did not get here by accident. We got here because Israelis demonstrated, through Operation Defensive Shield, that suicide bombing will not succeed, that Israel will not be blown up into making concessions, and that negotiating has to be done at the negotiating table.

President Bush's June 24, 2002, speech laid bare the pretense that Yasir Arafat was a legitimate interlocutor, and indeed after that speech Europeans and others stopped visiting him. And then we saw the polling data move. More and more Palestinians want to end this violence and have a more hopeful future. These are important signs.

Sometimes you need tough love. It was the lack of engagement with Arafat that gave us the hope for a better future. I know this runs against conventional wisdom, certainly in Europe and in the Arab world, and maybe among elements

in the United States. I said to a European friend recently, "You did something that you had never done before: you threatened to walk away. That is what enabled Salam Fayyad to become finance minister and Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) to become prime minister." We are starting to recognize that everyone has to accept their responsibilities. Steps have to be taken by all the partners. Engagement by the United States is not a deus ex machina. Everyone has to do his share.

I mentioned the settlements on the Israeli side. What Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said yesterday was an important statement, the first time he has ever delineated certain places he thought Israel would not be able to keep in any final-status deal. There are other things that have to be done with the outposts and halting the expansion of existing settlements.

On the Arab side, they and the Europeans need to ease the transition to a post- Arafat period. All the Europeans and Arabs I talk to privately say, "This guy can't make peace." It is time for them to say publicly what they say privately, because part of Arafat's legitimacy has been his position abroad. Some say, "You are personalizing this." No, in a one-man regime it is important who that one man is. And today there is a chance like there has not been in a long time; I fear it will be sabotaged if we do not shine a spotlight on what is going on.

Arafat has for almost a month now held up the appointment of Abu Mazen's cabinet. People need to go public. This is not just about making the transition to a post-Arafat period; it is about providing political cover for Israelis and Palestinians on the road to compromise. This means Arab leaders not just saying they regret that civilians were killed in a suicide bombing, but saying that suicide bombers undermine the cause. It means starting to name names. It means turning off the money from outside for the rejectionist elements. This money comes from charities related to states that are, supposedly, allies of the United States. Everyone has got to make a move.

Finally, there needs to be a public sense of hope and a reaching out to both Israelis and Palestinians to convince them that there is hope. I look at a Tel Aviv University index poll every month. It says, "Do you think peace with the Arabs is possible or impossible?" In 1999 33 percent thought peace with the Arabs was impossible. In December 2002 63 percent thought it was impossible. You need to condition the societal landscape. We have to do truth-telling about what is possible and what is impossible in terms of the right of return and the sharing of holy places, for example. It also has to happen on the Israeli side.

This is a difficult agenda, but there are no shortcuts. If anyone thinks there is a quick fix, that somehow we can impose a solution from the outside, that we can somehow find trustees or some international force so that no one has to take responsibility, we will be back to the 1990s again. Then no one will take any ownership of the peace process. Anything we impose would last no longer than five minutes. It might make some feel good to think that they had achieved something. But in fact, if the people themselves do not own this process, it will fail.

We have seen international forces -- like the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai or the UN Disengagement Observer Force on the Golan -- that have worked, and they have worked, in my mind, when there has been agreement. In the case of Egypt, there was a peace treaty. In the case of the Golan, it was a disengagement agreement where both countries had a strong interest in making it work. There were no population centers of Islamic militancy out to undermine the deal.

Where have they failed? The closest analogy is the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), where a third-party force was essentially just plopped down in the middle of hostile combatants who had an interest in undermining it. I don't think UNIFIL has stopped any terrorism over the twenty-five years since it was named. My concern is that we not have another UNIFIL-like situation in the Israeli-Palestinian arena -- not just because it won't be effective, but, frankly, if you drop in Americans or Europeans, you will undermine either U.S.-European-Israeli relations or U.S.-Palestinian relations. And the more the parties are at each other's throats and the more body bags go home, the

greater incentive rejectionists will have to continue their destructive actions.

In summary, there is no substitute for responsibility -- no shortcuts, no gimmicks -- and we cannot afford a return to the 1990s. The Middle East peace process is crucial. We all want dignity for both of these peoples -- a better future for them and their children. And the only way to make this happen is for everyone to take their responsibilities in this process seriously, rather than putting it all on America's shoulders and then diving under the table. We have to learn from the 1990s, or I fear we are doomed to repeat them.

Robert Satloff, The Washington Institute: We have heard quite a list of priorities for the agendas of the Bush administration and U.S. allies. Much of this runs to a core question of agreement about the perception of threats and opportunities -- and how one would order them.

It would be useful to look at differing perceptions of danger. Peter, you just heard Bob talk about the chief threat continuing to be nuclear weapons, with a special focus on Pakistan. You heard Patrick point out that, especially after September 11, Americans can no longer sit back and suggest that authoritarians in the Middle East simply look the other way. If the United States begins to act on these threats, how will such actions either clash or mesh with Europe's perceptions of danger?

David: To be blunt, the Europeans do not have that sense of danger. Obviously, generalizations like this are difficult, and European opinion is divided not only among individuals but between governments and countries.

Nevertheless, the common view in Western Europe is that, although September 11 was a great trauma for the United States, America has overreacted -- I am not saying I subscribe to this belief. The danger that Europeans now perceive is that U.S. military success in Iraq will create an even stronger feeling of omnipotence in Washington -- having overreacted after September 11 -- and encourage more adventures, more interventions that are not strictly necessary. How can the United States try to allay those fears while tackling the real threat it perceives from WMD and terrorism? This brings me back to my proposal to make sure you send a simple message about what you are trying to achieve.

The United States had a fairly simple message in Iraq. Here was a country that was known to be trying to produce and possess chemical and perhaps biological weapons, that had long wanted nuclear weapons, that was in breach of more than a dozen UN Security Council resolutions, that was clearly on the wrong side of the law, and that had been threatened with serious consequences by Security Council Resolution 1441. So this was a special case. Here the United States was justified in doing what it did.

However, it is important to treat Iraq as a special case and not regard success as a license to do other things that were not on the agenda at the beginning, such as sweeping away all the authoritarian or unfriendly regimes in the Middle East. That is just the thing to fuel suspicion. Keep it simple and be sure that the world understands in any particular instance what it is you are trying to achieve and why.

Satloff: Bob, you focused at least two of your three points on nuclear policy toward Iran and Pakistan. I gather these are things that cannot be carried out by the United States alone. How would you deal with needing the help of friends and allies if those allies have different threat perceptions than we do?

Gallucci: The United States is more likely to have friends and allies if it follows Peter's "keep it simple, stupid" prescription and does not regard Iraq as a model that should be replicated whenever it has trouble with another regime. Otherwise, it will be harder to attract help in addressing other concerns and threats in the region. But having said that, the next thing that needs to happen is internal within Washington. There needs to be an effort to focus policy on all three of these cases: Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan.

In the case of Iran, the Bush administration needs to reconsider where it is. If there is a coherent policy that is

supposed to produce an outcome that reduces the risk Iran poses, I do not understand what it is. If we have a long-term policy for dealing with Pakistan and the threat that emerges from the flow of nuclear materials or even weapons to terrorist groups, I do not understand what that is either. We need to bring others on board to make this work, but first there needs to be a policy process here in Washington that will reconsider our rather standoffish approach to Iran and our intermittent engagement with Pakistan. The Kashmir issue is a fuse that is in constant danger of being lit. It just sits there and makes the management of Pakistan's nuclear question that much more difficult. Satloff: Patrick, how would you go about pursuing a policy of political change, given this conversation about urgent dangers and urgent opportunities?

Clawson: The United States and its European allies do not share a perception of urgent danger. This goes back well over a decade. The Clinton administration spent a lot of effort trying to persuade Europe, with remarkably little success, that NATO should take on a counterproliferation or nonproliferation role. Successive administrations have said that we feel vulnerable to WMD and that we therefore want to build a missile-defense system, always to the incredulity of Europe. There is a long tradition of the United States feeling vulnerable and Europeans not believing it. That will not change.

Furthermore, there is a long tradition of Europe assuming that, when confronted with a difficult ruler, what you do is engage him, entice him, try to draw him into a dense network of relationships -- while keeping any element of confrontation or threat off the table. We have seen that approach in country after country. Europeans sincerely believe that approach to be the most effective way to work with difficult rulers. And so we have a difference in threat evaluation, but also a profound difference in evaluating the response to that threat. If anything, we are understating the depth of the differences between us.

Then we come along with an American agenda that says, "By the way, we want to promote political liberalization in these countries." Even if we do it in the modulated and carefully formulated ways that President Bush has talked about, we see hysterical reactions in Europe. They say, "The Americans are talking about sweeping away regimes and having revolutions," when, in fact, if you listen to the president's speeches, you notice how spare he is even in talking about democracy. He suggests that he has a long-term vision, that democracy is way out there.

So we will find yet another area of profound disagreement between the United States and Europe when we start talking about promoting political liberalization. On issue after issue, I see that disagreement in perspective growing across the Atlantic.

Satloff: Peter, do you see any area of opportunity for bridging some of this disagreement on threat perception and opportunity?

David: I suggested the idea of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. It would be an idea worth at least putting on the table. There are Security Council resolutions that have proposed creating such a zone, something the Europeans would support in this instance.

We are living with a completely changed strategic and military balance in the region, and an initiative for a WMD-free zone might begin to nibble away at the unanswered question of how you persuade the Iranians not to break out of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). The Iraqi war has sent a very strong message to any would-be proliferator. We have already begun to see a change of policy in North Korea, and I am sure that the Iranians are extremely impressed and anxious about what might come next after seeing this display of power on their doorstep. But what if one could add to this stick some sort of carrot, like the idea of trading Israel's undeclared nuclear weapons for a zone that has no unconventional weapons in it at all?

Satloff: Bob, do you want to respond to this?

Gallucci: I would like to come out completely in favor of a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East and then

express my skepticism at the likelihood that we could move there any time soon. I had an interesting experience in ACRS, the Arms Control and Regional Security working group. The issue very often turned to exactly what Peter referred: Israeli capabilities. Israel's position, ultimately, was that in the fullness of time -- which seemed to be either biblical or geological in nature -- one could imagine a change that would be of interest to the other states of the region. In the context of addressing Israel's security, I can imagine making real progress here. That is what I think Israeli diplomats were really saying.

There are things that could happen in the middle of this process, and we were trying to feel for what those were. There was the idea of a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty, just an idea that maybe we could stop producing fissile material, then perhaps do a better job of managing it, then reducing it, and ultimately reducing weapons. You can imagine all this, but you cannot imagine solving the weapons problem before you solve the security problem.

Makovsky: I agree with Bob that you can form an idea in principle. But in practice, anyone who wants Israel to trade land for peace cannot also say, "By the way, we are going to take away your nonconventional deterrent, too." That will not make Israelis feel more secure, especially because they do not think the same elements of transparency exist with a lot of the other countries in the region.

I share Patrick's concern about the lack of a common threat perception, which I fear could grow. It is upsetting. We are talking about things that go beyond Colin Powell talking to his European counterparts. There are differences in interests. With a country like France, there is a tendency to view multilateral institutions as a way of constraining the American colossus.

But when I look at the Iraq crisis and then look at the Middle East peace process, I am tempted to say, "If you didn't like the book, why go see the movie?" If the Europeans felt that they should thwart American interests in Iraq -- despite all the interdependencies on both sides of the Atlantic -- imagine what they would do if they had the decision on security considerations in the peace process.

I do not mean to come out against the Quartet. I want to be very clear so no one misinterprets me. I think the Quartet is a good idea in terms of broader consultation between all the parties. There has been too much effort -- and Arafat was the master of this -- to play Europe off against the United States. Therefore, it is important that these two are now consulting more.

But I am concerned that what we just went through at the Security Council in dealing with Iraq is a terrible precedent for how the Europeans will act on the issue of security. There is a danger that, due to differing threat perceptions, differences on both sides of the Atlantic will widen, not narrow, with time.

David: I agree with what David just said about the European role in Middle East peacemaking. By all means, keep the Quartet in existence for some marginal benefits. It provides cover and camouflage, and the Europeans can no doubt do some things on the side to soothe relations with some of the Arab participants.

But as I said in my opening remarks, too many European governments have said to their domestic audiences that, to make amends for what America has done in Iraq, we Europeans will make sure that the Americans do not get out of hand in how they sort out the Middle East peace process. The cause of peace is not advanced by that sort of approach, which is very common in Europe. The U.S. position, as I understand it, is to move swiftly to an independent Palestine, to help the partners negotiate an agreement in the context of the president's June 2002 speech and the Roadmap.

Achieving peace in the Middle East is in danger of becoming a second-order issue to Europeans, second to showing the European public that they are leaning on Israel heavily in order to make amends for the fact that the Americans leaned so heavily on Iraq. That is a perverse position to take.

Finally, I just don't believe the idea of a WMD-free zone should be dismissed in quite the way it has been. Israel does have peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, and shortly it will be abundantly clear that Iraq is no longer a threat to Israeli security. So this might not be a bad time to begin to think about the nuclear issue.

Not even the most hawkish Israelis believe that their nuclear deterrent is relevant in their conflict with the Palestinians. It might be something to put on the table in return for recognition by Iran and for an Iranian decision not to break out of the NPT and go nuclear itself. It seems to me the process of pushing for a WMDfree zone could in itself help the peace process along. Jonathan Davidson, European Commission: The transatlantic differences that have emerged on the panel about threat perceptions strike me as a way of missing a great opportunity. Surely the best way of capitalizing on such a window for promoting regional cooperation and political and economic liberalization is to instead build transatlantic cooperation. Peter, do you see any way in which the European role can be better deployed on the Roadmap and on liberalization in the region as a whole?

David: I only dwell on the differences because I am a journalist. I am not suggesting that politicians should dwell on the differences. On the contrary, the French, the Germans, and the Russians, who seem keen to dwell on the differences and to refight the Security Council's battles over Iraq, should forget about it and get on with business as usual. On the Roadmap, for goodness sake, do whatever you can to help the Americans broker a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians. Do not use that process to fight transatlantic battles.

Steven Cook, Brookings Institution: Patrick, you spoke about encouraging Arab regimes to build institutions that will eventually lead toward democratization. Many Arab countries already have institutions that resemble a democratic polity. If you were advising the president of the United States, what would you tell him to do to encourage these countries to actually empower these institutions?

Clawson: As Dennis Ross has commented several times to Washington Institute audiences, we do not have full and frank discussions about these issues with Arab governments even at the private level. We certainly do not raise these issues at the presidential level. That has to change. This has to be a matter that is not item number nineteen on a twenty-item agenda. It has to be an issue that is raised repeatedly by ambassadors and by the president.

We got economic reform in Egypt only by making a decade-long effort at every level -- sounding like a broken record -- from the president on down. That is the kind of commitment it takes to bring about these changes.

Barbara Slavin, USA Today: Patrick, you talked about the fact that we cannot have instant democracy and about the pitfalls of having elections too soon. In light of these concerns, what do you make of what we apparently are about to do in Iraq? Can we move toward real elections in that country within two years, given the total absence of civil society, real political parties, and so on?

Clawson: Local and provincial elections should precede national elections in Iraq. I would be quite skeptical of the idea that there will be a fully functioning free press, a variety of political parties, and functioning state or provincial legislatures in Iraq so that we can think about national elections within two years. But the pace at which we move toward national elections should be determined by the pace at which those building blocks are created.

Precisely because of my skepticism that we can do this quickly and because of my desire that we show we are prepared to leave the country soon, I do think it is a good idea to have some kind of an international administration. But, as Peter asked, why should we refight the old fights? Just as we were creative with the Quartet formula, can't we be creative in accepting some formula other than either the UN or the United States? Surely we can find alternatives between the two that will address the common concerns of all parties.

Slavin: Peter, how should we deal with the Iranians? On April 12, Hashemi Rafsanjani made an interesting statement on U.S.-Iranian relations, talking about ways in which those relations might move forward. Do you think there really is an opportunity there now, or is Rafsanjani just being his usual, wily self?

David: I resent your question, Barbara. It's so difficult. I noticed that Bob, who also raised this question, proposed that the United States think its policy through but did not say what that policy should be. So far as one can tell, the failure of the Iranian revolution will at some point result in that country becoming a different sort of political entity. There is a reform movement. There is a split. Most importantly, there are many young people -- the majority of the population -- for whom the revolution made in the name of Ayatollah Khomeini seems to have delivered nothing that they want. So time seems to be pushing in the right direction without any help from the outside.

One answer might be to counsel patience. Provided that Iran gets the message on the issues that are of direct concern to the outside world, namely the nuclear issue and noninterference with Iraq (do not let the Iranian Shi'is feel that they have an opportunity in Iraq to build a sphere of influence and to undermine what the Americans and U.S. partners are trying to do there), I would say let the Iranians liberalize themselves; let them extend their already quite extensive form of democracy themselves. Don't set it back by making it look as if it is a Western-imposed change.

Satloff: Bob, how would you address the Iranian nuclear question?

Gallucci: Extremely carefully. I want to plead guilty to Peter. There is a serious disagreement about Iran. Some would address these problems one way, and others a different way. I would engage Iran. I do not know exactly what that means, but I would look for an official dialogue, not an unofficial, track-two dialogue.

And I would not exclude discussing other issues in addition to our concerns about Iran's nuclear weapons, WMD, and missile programs. If there are possible links to be made with the Israeli nuclear weapons program, then I would consult with the Israelis about whether that is something that can be pursued. The Iranian nuclear weapons program is not principally driven by Israel, but neither is Israel irrelevant, at least in terms of rationalizing the program.

There is a drive for a hegemonic posture in the region that may go quite deep in the hearts of some Persians, and this may be difficult to respond to. But there is also a concern about Pakistan, along with other concerns one could induce. I would engage the Iranians. Standing out and offering the prospect of military force someday is not a good idea. I would never exclude that threat, but I would also look for some sort of dialogue as a method of getting at the things that concern us.

Makovsky: The fear I have is the perception created that if you cross the nuclear threshold like North Korea did, you will be treated with kid gloves, complete with diplomatic meetings. And if you do not cross it, you will be treated like Iraq. There is a legitimate fear that Iranian nuclear planners will speed up their activities based on this perception.

Rafsanjani himself might want to try to arrange a "South Korean" bargain on terrorism and U.S.-Iranian relations, saying, "Maybe I can cut a deal with you. You guys get off my back, and I will work with the mullahs on domestic reform." That's what Iranian reformers tell me. Rafsanjani might be capable of making this kind of deal, and it would put U.S. policymakers to the test.

Daniel Sternoff, The Washington Institute: This discussion has brought forward a wide range of priorities but has not brought us any closer to resolving how to prioritize them. Given that the U.S. election season is not far in front of us -- limiting anyone's ability to use the political capital they have built up for major initiatives -- how do we set the agenda for which of these issues the administration should handle immediately and which can be pushed off to a second term or a future administration?

Clawson: Peter got it right. We start with Iraq, and if we do Iraq well, it will have quite an effect throughout the region. On the other hand, if we mess up Iraq, no one will pay much attention to what else we have to say in the region. So the answer is Iraq first.

Gallucci: I recognize that there are political seasons in this country, but if halfway through an administration it becomes too late to deal with issues critical to the national security, then we are in deep trouble. Yes, we have to deal with Iraq, but I cannot imagine saying that it is too late to deal with Iran and Pakistan.

Makovsky: No one has the luxury of kicking Iran and Pakistan down the road for a couple of years, especially given Muhamed ElBaradei's International Atomic Energy Agency report on Iran. And on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, we need a sense that the partners are willing to step up to the plate and assume their responsibilities. If they are not willing to do so, then that issue will have to wait. The onus is on them. ❖

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