

Winning the Peace in the Middle East: A Bipartisan Blueprint for Postwar U.S. Policy

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Brief Analysis

On April 9, 2003, The Washington Institute released a major policy document, [Winning the Peace in the Middle East: A Bipartisan Blueprint for Postwar U.S. Policy. \(templateC04.php?CID=157\)](#) Dennis Ross, Washington Institute director/Ziegler distinguished fellow, and Robert Satloff, the Institute's director of policy and strategic planning, discussed the principal recommendations of this document, whose executive summary follows. The report is endorsed by:

- Former secretary of state Lawrence Eagleburger
- Former speaker of the House Newt Gingrich
- Former secretary of state Alexander Haig
- Former Democratic senator Robert Kerrey
- Former secretary of defense William Perry
- Former Republican senator Fred Thompson
- Former director of central intelligence R. James Woolsey

President George W. Bush declared that Iraq would be disarmed -- peacefully if possible, through force if necessary. While resort to arms was surely not the preferred option, Saddam Husayn's determination to preserve his weapons of mass destruction (WMD) ensured that the United States and its allies would be left with no choice but to act militarily. The path to war has not been precipitous. If the United States is now to avoid the age-old fear of winning the war but losing the peace, the administration's postwar priorities must reflect an understanding of the challenges it faces and the choices it must make.

In the aftermath of the war, the United States must balance recognition of the historic opportunity to advance U.S. interests in the Middle East with a realistic view of what is possible and what is not.

America's first priority must be to win the peace by stabilizing Iraq and helping the Iraqi people re-claim their country after a generation of Saddam's tyranny. An effective and vigilant security force will be required, particularly if remnants of the old order continue resistance. Stabilizing Iraq is both possible and necessary, for the sake of that country's long-suffering people as well as for the sake of the allied forces that will secure the country after the demise of Saddam's regime. Only if the United States invests in helping Iraqis build a new Iraq will it have the moral standing and political authority to promote its other objectives in the region: combating terrorism; compelling a change in the rogue behavior of regimes that sponsor terrorism and seek WMD; championing democratization and liberalization within the region's closed, authoritarian states; and rebuilding the possibility of peace between Arabs and Israelis. If we do not invest in helping Iraqis rebuild Iraq, then the legacy of our incomplete mission in that country will impede all our other Middle East endeavors for many years to come.

With a first-things-first approach, the U.S. policy in Iraq should plan on a sequence of stabilization, transition, and formation of a new government. As soon as practicable, U.S.-led forces should give way to multinational peace-maintenance forces, preferably operating within an international framework. Similarly, as soon as practicable, an interim international administration should be established to work with Iraqis -- from among Iraq's talented technocracy, its creative exile community, and its functioning regional authorities in the north -- to develop new political institutions and to enable Iraqis to manage their own postwar economic reconstruction. Throughout, the

goal must be to assist Iraqis in building their own country anew, with a government that will be broad-based, representative, and responsible to its citizens and the international community.

Helping Iraqis achieve this transformation in their country will take time and commitment; its success, however, can contribute greatly to positive change throughout the region.

The demise of Saddam Husayn's regime can be an object lesson for other Middle East tyrannies that support terrorism and seek WMD. The leaders of both Syria and Iran, for example, should not miss the message that countries that pursue Saddam's reckless, irresponsible, and defiant behavior could end up sharing his fate. Conversely, countries that verifiably end their rogue behavior will reap rewards. For Syria, the main test will be to sever irrevocably its connection with terrorist groups, both those headquartered in Damascus and those, especially Hizballah, that operate with Syrian support and assistance in Lebanon. For Iran, the main test will be to recognize that its continued pursuit of WMD, especially nuclear weapons, detracts from its security rather than enhances it. Throughout, the United States must persist, in concert with its allies, in the vital work of combating terrorist networks that operate in and from the Middle East, disrupting terrorist financing and logistical support, and denying terrorists the political succor of those who would distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable forms of terrorism.

On the positive front, success in defeating Saddam and helping Iraqis rebuild their country offers opportunities for the United States to support the efforts of Arab and Iranian liberals to open the region's closed, authoritarian societies. This will be the moment to assist their fight for greater freedom, not draw away from them; tactics will differ throughout the region, but this principle, to be credible, should apply to friendly and adversarial regimes alike. Promoting democratization is not a policy born of altruism; widening the scope of political and economic participation is ultimately the best way to help Middle Easterners define their own destiny peacefully and responsibly and thereby bolster the stability of America's friends and strengthen long-term U.S. relations with the peoples of the region. It is also an indispensable part of the battle for hearts and minds in the war on terror.

Finally, America's postwar agenda must address the issue of Arab-Israeli peacemaking. After all, Arab leaders will surely come to President Bush and proclaim that he has proved himself in war, now he must, for their sake and the sake of America's standing in the region, prove himself in peace.

While Arab-Israeli peace is an enduring American interest, here too the administration's approach must be clear-eyed and realistic. One lesson from the past is unmistakable: No U.S. initiative can succeed in circumstances in which all sides wait for the others to act -- or, as has too often been the case, for the United States to act for them. The prerequisite for any presidential effort to reenergize the peace process after Saddam's demise must be the assumption of concrete responsibilities by Arab states, Palestinians, and Israelis that give diplomacy a strong chance to succeed. At this point, President Bush's answer to Arab leaders who will press him to assume his responsibilities should be that they must first act -- especially with specific steps that delegitimize the leaders, groups, and states that remain committed to using terror.

As the United States continues to support Israel in the face of terrorism, it should also persist in its efforts to promote processes of reform within the Palestinian Authority, consistent with the president's commitment to lend tangible support to the project of Palestinian statehood once Palestinians are no longer led by those "compromised by terror." The appointment of a prime minister is a hopeful signpost along this road. Washington should work for the full "empowerment" of the Palestinian prime minister, press for more comprehensive reform, and assist with efforts to promote dialogue between Israel and the new Palestinian leadership to reach preliminary understandings on defusing conflict. If Arabs, Palestinians, and Israelis take the necessary steps to make the regional environment more conducive to diplomacy, that would pave the way for a more ambitious agenda for Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking, including intensive presidential engagement.

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